



A CONSERVATION NOTEBOOK

by Homer Stevens

It's very likely that this was an all time record year for oak pollen. Absolutely all of the various species of oak trees found in this area proliferated in pollen production. Here on the Farm we've experienced more oak pollen related allergies than ever in history. Yellow pollen dust and catkins (male oak blooms) covered sidewalks, other walkways, and were a real nuisance in the swimming pool. This, of course, is the result of good moisture through most of the winter and early spring.

All of this precipitated the message of the month "OAKS of TEXAS". Actually I have decided that if I were to start my career over, I would major in horticulture at Texas A & M and specialize in native Texas Oak trees. This premonition is not only the result of oak pollen induced sneezing attacks, but has been in the speculation stage for several years. There are 43 different species of oak trees in the state, 38 of them are considered trees, and the other 5 are shrubs. There are two major groups of oaks—Red Oaks and White Oaks.

The White Oaks produce acorns each year while the Red Oaks take 2 years to produce an acorn crop. There are other differences but the main purpose of this edition is to give tidbits of information on the species found here on the Farm and other areas of Bandera County.

Growing naturally in the pastures here on the Farm there are Black Jack Oak, Lacey Oak, Live Oak, Post Oak, Spanish Oak, and Durand Oak. In addition over the years specimens of Burr Oak, Shumard Oak, and Chinkapin Oak have been purchased and transplanted. All of these are doing well and have grown into big beautiful trees.

Being an eternal optimist, in the fall of 2013, I collected acorns from all of the above mentioned species and planted them in containers. The results were gratifying for specimens of every species sprouted and grew throughout 2014. In January of 2015 one specimen of each species was transplanted in an open area of the Farm Recreation area yard. This is the beginning of the "Oaks of Texas" Nursery. Optimistically in 10 to 15 years someone may begin to realize a little shade from these acorns. However, it will be interesting to see how much extra TLC can stimulate the different species. Also take note of the fact that the best time to plant oak acorns



is immediately when they begin to fall from the trees in the fall. All indications at this time are that there will be a huge acorn crop this fall.

Some sources say that all species of oaks are subject to the oak wilt fungus disease, and therefore should be planted only with prior knowledge and reservations. However, it might be pointed out that any of the trees that acorns were collected from that were growing naturally here on the Farm are 100 years old or significantly more. That is the Live Oak, Lacey Oak, Post Oak, Black Jack Oak, Spanish Oak, and Durand Oak.

The Burr Oak and Chinkapin Oak are only about 25 years old, having been obtained in 1991 as bare root plants, the result of a special gift from Bandera Electric Coop. These trees in

front of the Party Pavilion are over 60' tall and have canopies with at least 25' radius.

The White Oaks, while possibly not completely immune to Oak Wilt, seem to be the least susceptible. The White Oaks dealt with here are Burr Oak, Lacey Oak, Chinikapin Oak, Post Oak, and Durand Oak.

Since oaks are to be a sort of specialty for this column a single new species will be picked for special treatment with each edition. So please meet the Post Oak. This is a tall straight tree of the white oak group. Being a white oak tells us that it produces acorns every year and does not have spines on the tips of its leaf lobes. The Post Oak is not a dominant tree in Bandera County. It prefers the more reddish soils which occur only in relatively small pockets. Here on the Farm there are two groves, one in the very highest point of the RV Park, and the other on the East bank of Hicks Creek next to Highway 2828. The predominant habitat of this oak species is in the deeper more acid soils of East Texas. Because of its height and size it could be a good shade tree, but here in Bandera County its value is probably only as an occasional specimen planting for someone seeking variety, realizing that it may require special TLC. Post Oak has the reputation of being difficult to transplant, and a general aversion to human activity.

Actually, trees in general that have spent most of their lives in a natural or wild state don't like human activity. They don't like to have soil hauled in and added to their root cover, especially if that soil is a clay consistency, they don't like pruning, they don't like having decks built around them, they don't like ditches dug in their root zones, and they don't like having heavy vehicles driven over their root zones. Those things being said, there are trees that have withstood almost all of these embellishments and survived.

It is interesting to note that in Texas Monthly magazines June of 2013 edition in listing the "(50 Best BBQ Joints in the World)" 17 of them professed that Post Oak was their wood of choice.



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