



## TEXAS BLUE OAK & LAND STEWARDSHIP

The initial and primary goal of this column is to extend knowledge and encourage LAND STEWARDSHIP. Therefore these practices should be mentioned in each publication. A secondary purpose would be not to dwell or over extend any of the Stewardship concepts. Almost any source of rangeland ecology will present the carrying capacity of hill country properties as being 20 to 30 acres per animal unit. An animal unit being 1 mature cow and calf from conception to weaning. Other equivalents being 1 bull 1.35 au, 1 horse 1.25 au, 1 sheep .20 au, 1 goat .15 au. , white tailed deer .15 au.

It would be easy to become totally absorbed in dreaming up thousands of different scenarios that could become exceptions to these generalities so lets just pose a different question with each chapter of this publication and point out some of the consequences of land over grazing. The misuse of the land does not become evident over night, but generally speaking bare ground that is either a dust bowl or mud hole is the result. The not surprising thing is that after the situation becomes unbearable and the animals (whatever they may be) are removed, the first vegetation that will return are thistles, milkweeds, and other obnoxious species that nothing will eat. The return of the land to an acceptable condition may take 5 years or more without use of conscious production practices.

As mentioned in the Fall 2015 edition special attention will be given to our wide variety of Oak trees. The special Oak of this edition will be Lacy Oak or Texas Blue Oak henceforth TBO. The main attractions of this medium size tree are its leaves. They come in as small peach colored growths in the early spring and go out with an even more pronounced peach color in the fall. However, the real and

longest lasting attraction are the name sake blue-green mature leaves that characterize it for a relatively long period of time in the Spring and Summer. The bark is typically dark gray and deeply fissured.

TBOs are members of the White Oak group meaning that they produce acorns every year. In addition to yearly acorn production White Oaks have a smooth acorn cup, do not have bristles at the leaf tips, and have gray scaly bark.

“The natural habitat is in south central Texas to the Trans-Pecos in thin alkaline or rocky limestone soils up into the Chisos Mountains of Big Bend National Park.

The leaves are quite small in comparison to other oaks. TBO is a trouble free tree that should be used more in the landscape.” (Howard Garrett’s Texas Trees)

From my own experiences here on “The Farm” TBO is one of my all time favorite trees. There are only three that have grown naturally here on the property, but they are absolutely beautiful specimens. Each of them are 18”-20” in diameter, and the canopies are over 25’. These are growing on the edge of a steep cliff bordered by huge limestone boulders. From this observation it would appear that they prefer good drainage. However, the nine that have been purchased from nursery stock and planted on the left of the road just past the entrance to Farm Country RV Park are in pure caliche clay and have survived.

The biggest problem with these plantings is that the cages were removed when it appeared that they were above deer bite height. They weathered the bite ok, but Axis males did major damage rubbing the velvet off their horns. After being recaged these trees seem to be doing well. Due to limited supply TBO wood has not been used to any extent for BarBQ, however it would seem that it would be comparable to Live Oak, and therefore acceptable for BarBQ or grilling.

The biggest observed drawback to TBO here on the Farm is that they are extremely slow growing. The trees described above are no more than 10’ tall. Chinkapin and Burr Oak planted at the same time are more than twice as tall.