



Since climate change seems to be an accepted happening and human activities are quite likely a contributing factor, it would be easy to go on an extended rant as to what should be done. Anyone that has experienced traffic conditions in Austin, Houston, or Dallas might surmise that actions relating to reducing carbon dioxide emissions might be like working against the wind. It would be naive to think that any one single action, if any, is going to cure the world's environmental problems. Folks really should consult with AgriLife Extension agents, Natural Resource Conservation personnel, and people like Jim Stanley (author and Master Naturalist) regarding developing whatever segments of the environment that they may control. This column is dedicated to dispensing tidbits of knowledge that may help in various kinds of environmental friendly decision making.

The specific object of wisdom for this edition will be the Chinkapin Oak (*Quercus muhlenbergii*). In Howard Garrett's "Texas Trees" it is a deciduous shade tree that grows 70 to 90 feet tall and has a canopy of 70 to 80 feet. It is often seen in deeper well-drained soils along rivers and in creek bottoms. It likes moist and swampy soil but can also grow in drier, rocky soils. The leaves are tooth, not lobed, alternate, simple, and deciduous. The bark is light gray-colored and flaky.

Interestingly! Sally and Andy Wasowski in their "Native Texas Plants" credit Chinkapin Oaks as having a 40-60 foot height and a 20-40 foot canopy. This is not quite as large as the Garrett description. They also credit these oaks as growing in loam, clay, caliche, limestone, calcareous soils. The discrepancies are probably only due to the variance in the primary home locations of the authors.

The Wasowski's proceed to describe the trees as "beautiful, with a dark, glossy, almost lush look. Usually tall and slender, old trees can sometimes get "middle aged spread," forming a broad irregular crown. Chinkapin oaks seem to be especially sensitive to lawn chemicals and atmospheric pollutants. It can handle growing by your driveway or on a quiet street, but on a busy street the leaves get discolored by car exhaust."

The specimen Chinkapin oak here on The Farm has a canopy in the 60' range. The height is tall, precise figures are not available. The leaves are toothed, glossy and relatively large. This is a truly beautiful tree that is located on the west end of our shuffleboard slab where many marriages have taken place. It has really been an asset for shading this important area from the west sun. The soil where this tree is growing is certainly not outstanding consisting of caliche and loose limestone rock. It has never received any extra watering or significant nurture of any kind.

Of all the oak trees planted, with around a dozen of this species to choose from on the Farm property, Chinkapins would appear to be arguably the best choice so far as rate of growth, variations in soil tolerance, disease resistance, and mature growth appearance. Please realize that it is impossible to make a definite definitive statement regarding the value of one tree species over another with only 25 years of comparative experience. The first Chinkapin oak was transplanted from a container in approximately 1992 and fits the preceding outlined explanation of desirable traits. Of the seedlings planted three years ago, the Chinkapin has outgrown all of the other seven species.