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Photos by Lorna Allen & Linda. Kershaw

BUR OAK

Quercus macrocarpa Michx.

BEECH FAMILY (FAGACEAE)

Plants: Low shrubs to tall deciduous trees, usually 12-18 m tall with broad, rounded crowns and deep roots; trunks straight, 60-80 cm wide; branches spreading to ascending; twigs hairy, often with corky ridges; buds flat-lying, hairy, with broad scales plus a few slender scales at the base, 3-6 mm long; bark greyish brown, sometimes red-tinged, thick, flaky, with deep, irregular ridges.

Leaves: Alternate, deciduous, firm shiny green, paler beneath with numerous star-shaped hairs, 10-30 cm long, egg-shaped in outline, broadest at the rounded tip and tapered to the base, pinnately lobed; lobes broad, blunt, (5-)9-15(-17), most deeply cut near mid-leaf; leaves shed in autumn, but some may persist through the winter.

Flowers: Tiny, unisexual, with males and females on the same tree; female flowers reddish, in inconspicuous, compact clusters of 1-5; male flowers yellow, numerous, hanging in slender clusters (catkins); in early spring (before leaves).

Fruits: Round nuts (acorns), green when young, reddish brown when mature, 2-3 cm long, often single, tipped with a short, abrupt point and with the lower 1/3-3/4 or more seated in a thick, knobby, copiously fringed cup, stalkless or short-stalked; seeds single, white kernels; mature in the first autumn.

Habitat: Wide ranging, from rich floodplains to rocky uplands.

Status: S1

Notes: This species has also been called mossy-cup oak. • These attractive, hardy trees are often cultivated in western parks and gardens. Dispersal of acorns from domestic trees, by birds and small mammals, could make it difficult to distinguish native and introduced populations. • Current status is Global G5; United States N5? (Alabama S2, Connecticut S3, District of Columbia S1, Illinois S5, Indiana S5, Iowa S5, Kentucky S5, Louisiana S1, Maryland S1, Massachusetts S3, Mississippi S2, Montana S1, New Hampshire S1, New York S4, Virginia S1, West Virginia S4, Wyoming S2S3) and Canada NNR (Alberta S1?, Manitoba S5, New Brunswick S2, Ontario S5, Quebec S3S4, Saskatchewan S5?). • This is Canada's most widespread and common oak. With their thick bark and deep roots, the trees are drought resistant and can grow in grasslands, but they are also capable of thriving in rich, moist or wet sites. • Chippewa boiled the inner bark to make a tea for treating cramps and lung problems. The Iroquois steeped the bark to make a tea for relieving diarrhoea, and the Ojibwa used a similar tea to stop bleeding. The acorns have been used as food, roasted in ashes, boiled, mashed and eaten with grease or duck broth or chopped and added to soups and stews. Sometimes they were leached with basswood ashes to reduce their bitterness.

