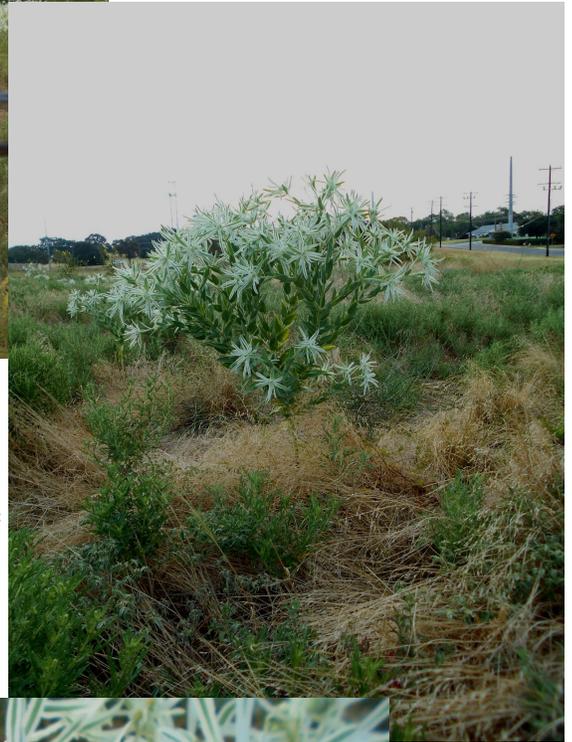


Snow-on-the-Prairie *cont'd*



Prairie view



Stand alone



Close-up of bracts, cyathiums and seed pods

Plant an oak, leave a legacy

Guest article from Cecil Carter,
husband of Polly

An oak's genetic makeup is complex. They have not been "domesticated". Planting an oak from edible acorns will not insure a tree that produces edible acorns. Edibility is a function of the amount of tannins in the acorn. Few people will invest 15 years in planting an oak orchard only to find the acorns are inedible due to the tannins.

Growing oaks from acorns can be an interesting hobby. Oaks are interesting for several reasons. They are beautiful. They provide great shade. They grow reasonably fast. About 15 years ago, Polly and I planted three Shumard Oaks that were about 3 feet tall. They are now 30 feet tall. When you plant an oak, you are leaving a 200-year legacy.

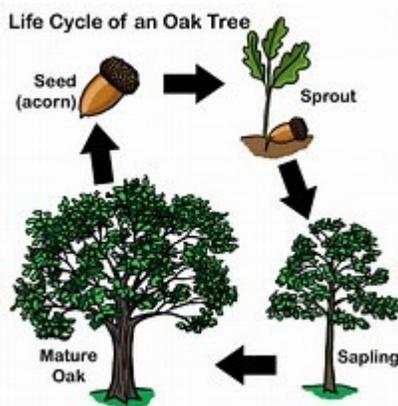
Or consider *Quercus virginiana*, a species of live oak tree found in coastal areas. It is estimated by the Texas Forest Service that the Big Tree, on Goose Island, is over 1,000 years old. THAT is a legacy.

All my trees came from acorns. And this is to share how I propagate them. First, some basics. There are probably 20 different species of oaks found in Texas. There are two basic groups: Red most times called black) and white. For example, oaks you would recognize in the red/black oak group include red, black, Shumard, blackjack, water, willow and pin oaks. Common oaks in the white oak group include white, post, bur, and chinquapin. Most of their leaves are unique. I find the leaf of the chinquapin oak particularly distinctive. Acorns vary in size from the big bur oak acorns to the small post oak acorns and live oak acorns.



I gather my acorns for planting from desirable specimens of trees. The first thing I do is "float" them. That means I dump them in a bucket of water and I discard the ones that float as that means they have air in them and are likely damaged by worms. Then I put them in the freezer for several weeks to kill any insects that may be in them. After a suitable time, I take my thumb nail and depress it into the shell of the acorn. If it sinks in, I look for the worm hole. If I find it, I discard the acorn. The worms can survive freezing for two weeks.

Different Types of Oaks require a little different handling. Acorns in the "red oak" group tend to be dormant longer. Dormancy simply means that acorns may take two years to germinate. Those in the white oak group can germinate almost immediately after falling from the tree. Fritz Poppe gave us 12 bur oak acorns two years ago and 6 germinated the next spring. This is important so you won't immediately throw out acorns from the red oak group when they don't immediately germinate.



Acorns from the red/black group need stratification. If you store acorns outside over the winter, be sure they are in a cage to avoid being eaten by squirrels or other animals. I will frequently keep them in the refrigerator to break the dormancy.

I gather my acorns in the fall and plant them in pots in the early spring. Place the acorns in good soil, on their side, and cover with at least one inch of rich dirt. Bur oaks will need more covering. Use containers at least 8" deep or deeper. When the seedling gets 8" high, the root will be 8" inches deep. I never try to dig seedling oaks in the yard or forests that are over 4" in height because getting all of the root is very, very hard. Don't fertilize them.

I have my "tree farm" in partial shade. To winter them over, if need be, we pile a layer of leaves around them. I've found a good way to mark the trees is to buy a box of colored "zip ties" and place them loosely on the seedlings. The colors of zip ties let me know what kind of tree they are. It is hard to tell when the limbs are bare. Also remember, seedlings will not last without water. I could not have a "tree farm" without Polly and her excellent care. She takes over the watering duties, even through the winter.

After the trees have gotten established in a pot for a year, I plant them in the ground the second fall or give them away. We always have a lot to give away.

A Day in the Life of a Roadrunner

*Photos from Dorothy Thetford;
Narration by roadrunner*



1 Adventure time!



2 Which way shall I go?



3 Could this be a shortcut?



4 Making tracks now . . .



5 Eeek! This big city traffic could
get you run over.



Better rest a bit.
Texas heat is so
brutal!

6