

The Oak Tree

Did you know that in England there are two native species of Oak Tree?

Firstly - there is the English Oak QUERCUS ROBUR, sometimes known as the Pendunculate Oak.

Secondly - there is the Durmast Oak QUERCUS PETRAEA or the Sessile Oak.

There are several ways to distinguish between the species although not always obvious at first glance.

The English Oak has grey bark which is finely cracked and ridged, while the Durmast Oak bark has longer, straighter crevices and tends to be less cracked.

The English Oak has very short stalked leaves with deep lobes, with two small backward pointing lobes at the base, while the leaves of the Durmast Oak have long stalks and lack the small, backward pointing lobes and taper smoothly onto the stalk.

The twigs of the English Oak have rounded but pointed buds while the Durmast Oak is distinguishable by its grey-purple twigs. Both species flower - the Male catkins are abundant in short clusters during early May as the leaves unfurl on the English Oak, the female catkins are similar, but are shorter and bear minute flowers. The Male catkins of the Durmast Oak are longer and the female catkins are hidden under the leaf joints.

When the fruiting of the Acorns is in evidence on the trees, it is one of the best times to tell the species apart. The Acorn of the English Oak are held on long stalks called Penduncles, which is where the Tree gets its alternative name of the Pendunculate Oak. The Acorns of the Durmast Oak sit directly on the twig giving the Tree its alternative name of the Sessile Oak.

The stalks are on the Acorns of the English Oak and on the leaves of the Durmast Oak.

The English Oak is common throughout Europe, except the far north, they are the most important forest tree of the whole of north-west Europe. They can be extremely variable in shape and size, sometimes producing tall, ragged crowns, in some cases up to 45 metres high, but more often they are a massive, twisted dome often less than 20 metres high when fully mature.

The Durmast Oak is a very similar tree but rarely forms the huge, low crowns of the English Oak, it is typically a taller, straighter and more elegant tree than the insect pruned English Oak. They largely replace the English Oak as the main forest tree on the thinner, acid soils of northern and western Britain, its woods as a result, tends to be of a much poorer quality and has far less in the way of associated plants and insects. While the English Oak is often stripped by Moth caterpillars and other insects feeding the world around them, the same is a rarity in the Durmast Oak.

With the heavy soiled earth of the English Midlands, the English Oak thrives in the deep fertile forests and woodland, feeding the heart and spirit of the natural order and flow of the flora and fauna, living in harmony with the land.

Hawk Elderin