

Willow Oak *Quercus phellos*

Description

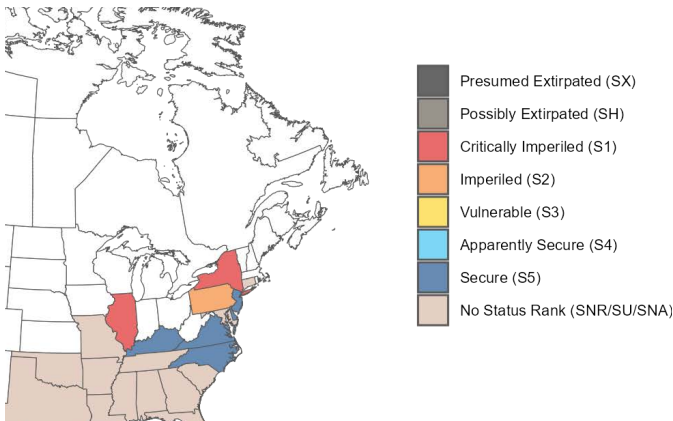
Willow Oak is a deciduous tree that may grow to 80 feet (25 meters) in height. The bark is dark gray and furrowed. The leaves are alternately arranged, lance-shaped, without the lateral teeth and lobes typical of most Pennsylvania species of oaks, 2 to 4 inches (5 to 10 cm) long and 3/8 to 3/4 inch (less than 2 cm) wide, bristle-tipped, and usually hairless on both surfaces at maturity. The flowers, appearing from late April to May, are unisexual, with female flowers occurring singly or in pairs and male flowers arranged in much more conspicuous clusters of long, drooping catkins. The fruit is an acorn averaging about 3/8 inch (about 1 cm) in length, and is covered about 1/4 to 1/2 of its length by a scaly saucer-like cup.



Photo source: PNHP

North American State/Province Conservation Status

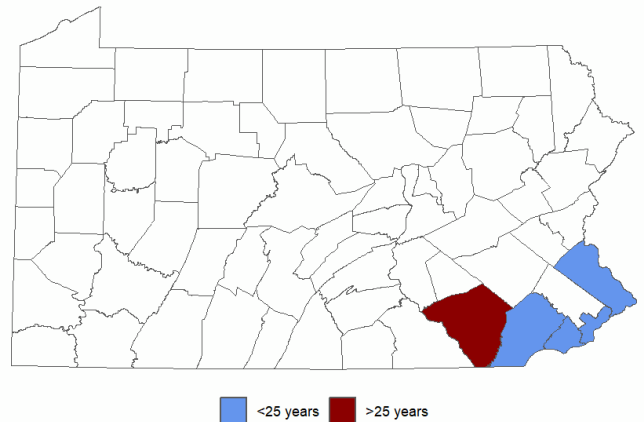
Map by NatureServe 2025



Distribution & Habitat

Willow Oak has a range from New York south and west into Texas and Florida, and is primarily coastal in the eastern portion of its distribution. In Pennsylvania, it represents a southerly species and has been documented historically in a few southeastern counties. Willow Oak grows in damp to swampy woods, thickets, and bottomlands.

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State Status & Conservation

Willow Oak has a rarity status of Endangered, based on the relatively few populations that have been documented and the limited state range. Some populations of Willow Oak are threatened by habitat loss, invasive species, and in some locations, excessive browsing by deer. Establishing buffers around fragmented forested habitat and removal of invasive species will help to maintain populations.

NatureServe conservation status ranks

G5 — Globally Secure; S2S3 — Imperiled in Pennsylvania



References

- NatureServe. 2025. NatureServe Explorer [web application] NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available at <https://explorer.natureserve.org> (Accessed: May 8, 2025)
- Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program. 2025.
- Rhoads, A.F. and W.M. Klein, Jr. 1993. The Vascular Flora of Pennsylvania. American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- Rhoads, A.F. and T.A. Block. 2007. The Plants of Pennsylvania: An Illustrated Manual. 2nd edition. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.