

Blackjack Oak *Quercus marilandica*

Text and Photos by Rod Simmons

Blackjack Oak is a relatively small, native oak of woodland edges of dry, acidic upland ridges, gravel terraces, and serpentine barrens. It was once more common throughout the region, flourishing in cut-over upland forests converted to grazing pastures in the past, but is increasingly rare today as a result of extensive fragmentation and urbanization. Most of Alexandria's specimens occur along Seminary Road, the old "ridge" road that ascends the high terraces from Bailey's Crossroads to the Episcopal Seminary (the highest point in the City). Another City co-champion Blackjack Oak grows nearby on the old, high gravel terrace at Ft. Ward Park, at the north edge of the main parking area. (For further descriptions of the terraces and local geology, see "Plate 5: Surficial Geology and Landforms—Expanded Explanation" by Tony Fleming, Geologist, at <http://alexandriava.gov/22560>.)



Rounded-lobed form of Blackjack Oak leaves on tree at high gravel terrace at Turkeycock Run Stream Valley Park in Annandale, Virginia (left) and the pointed-lobed form of Blackjack Oak leaves on tree at Travilah Serpentine Barrens, Montgomery County, Maryland.

Bush's Oak (*Quercus x bushii*) - a fairly common natural hybrid between Blackjack Oak and the much larger Black Oak (*Quercus velutina*) - is perhaps more commonly seen today than pure Blackjack Oak. The hybrid has foliage similar to Blackjack Oak (though larger-leaved and less rounded), but is usually a much larger tree. The City champion Bush's Oak grows in an old section of woodland at Stevenson Park. Many champion-sized Blackjack Oaks on Big Tree lists are probably the hybrid. Black Oak and Southern Red Oak (*Quercus falcata*) saplings and young trees also often have foliage that resembles Blackjack Oak. (See "Native Vascular Flora of the City of Alexandria, Virginia" at <http://alexandriava.gov/22560> for more on native oaks and their natural hybrids in the City of Alexandria.) A database of these and other notable trees in Alexandria is maintained by the City Arborist Office.

Arlington County natural resource management staff Greg Zell and Alonso Abugattas assist Rod Simmons and Scott Graham of the City of Alexandria Dept. RPCA, Horticulture and Natural Resources Section, measure a City co-champion Blackjack Oak (*Quercus marilandica*) at the south corner of the intersection of N. Howard St. and Seminary Rd.

