

White Oak

(*Quercus alba*)

White Oak is a large, long-lived tree common in the eastern half of the US. It is found throughout this region with the exception of the coastal areas of the Southeast, and at higher elevations. It is slow growing, but can attain 100 feet in height, and some White Oaks are over 500 years old. The lumber from White Oak is prized, and the acorns from the tree are a key food source for a variety of wildlife.

White Oak flowers in the spring, at about the same time as the leaves emerge. The male flowers are long catkins (see above, left) that produce copious amounts of pollen. White Oak produces more pollen than any other plant, and the pollen is confirmed as a major cause of allergic rhinitis and asthma. Several allergens have been identified from the pollen. White Oak typically only pollinates for a period of several days, depending on the weather conditions. The pollen, while completely wind-borne, will usually only travel a few hundred yards from the tree. Stronger winds, of course, can increase this range, and the larger trees can disperse pollen even further.

There are over 70 recognized species of Oak in the US, and with varieties that number swells to almost 200. Significant cross-reactivity should be expected within the *Quercus* Genus. Some species of Oak do not appear to be as allergenic as others, but the four Oaks carried by Antigen Labs, White, Red, Live and Gambel, all have demonstrated positive allergy skin tests in allergic patients.

