

# ECOQUEST

## Oak-tober 2020

# The Oakey Pokey



The southern live oak (*Quercus virginiana*) is an iconic southern tree, often seen dripping with spanish moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*).

Sarasota-Manatee EcoFlora's October EcoQuest challenge is the Oakey Pokey, focusing on the 11 native oak species found in Sarasota and Manatee Counties. These shrubs and trees are important to our local ecosystems. Their branches provide shelter, their leaves a natural mulch, their acorns a critical food source for animals, and their shade important to both forest and urban microclimates. The spanish moss that often hangs from oak trees makes excellent nesting material for birds. The threatened Florida scrub jay, Florida's only endemic bird, lives in scrubby areas with a healthy diversity of xeric (dry habitat) oak shrubs. Oaks are also important trees in our home and urban landscapes and historically important sources of timber.

We challenge you to do the Oakey Pokey this month and get yourself around, by posting observations of all 11 native oak species. Don't forget to document their interactions with animals while you're at it. That's what it's all about!

## WHAT IS AN ECOQUEST?

EcoQuests, part of the [Sarasota-Manatee EcoFlora Project](#), challenge Floridians to become engaged citizens in the observation, study, appreciation, and conservation of the native flora and fauna of Florida, and understand the impacts to it by exotic species.

## HOW DO I GET STARTED?

1. Download the easy-to-use iNaturalist app on your mobile device, or visit [iNaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org) on your computer.
2. Set up a user account or sign in to join projects and submit observations.
3. Visit the [Sarasota-Manatee EcoFlora Flora Oakey Pokey page](#) and click "join" on the upper right.
4. Photograph plants anywhere in Sarasota and Manatee Counties. Take multiple photos to show important features for identification (overall plant, leaves, flowers, fruit, stem).
5. Post your observations to iNaturalist.
6. Check out [your ranking](#) on this month's challenge online!

## WHAT IS THE GOAL?

Help us document as many of our native oak species as possible throughout Oak-tober! Remember that any observation still contributes to the Sarasota-Manatee EcoFlora Project, even if it's not featured in our monthly challenge.

## WHERE SHOULD I LOOK?

Oaks can be found in neighborhoods, parks, and our many natural areas in southwest Florida, including Selby Gardens' Downtown Sarasota and Historic Spanish Point campuses. Remember, oaks live in a wide range of habits from moist hammocks (laurel oak) to the driest scrub (sand live oak), so look everywhere!

**NOTE:** Oak trees can be tricky to identify so if you're interested in diving deeper into oak identification, we have included a key below to help. Make sure to include photos of the leaves (top and bottom), bark, and acorns. If you are unable to identify the species of oak that you upload, just type "Quercus" (the genus name) into the iNaturalist ID field, and our community of experts can try to help!

## Key to Oaks of Sarasota and Manatee Counties

Oaks are members of the Beech family (*Fagaceae*) and are found all around the world. In the region of the Sarasota-Manatee Ecoflora project, there are 11 documented species. Unfortunately, oaks can sometimes be difficult to identify. When oaks are young or regrowing from damage, their leaf shapes can vary wildly and they are known to hybridize. Not all oak species have mature acorns at the same time so that may not always be a reliable character to use for identification. As you embark on your EcoQuest to do the Oakey Pokey during October, please use this key to help you. To use the key, pick the best choice from each pair of numbers and continue until you encounter the best name based on your plant. Click on the hyperlinks for each species which will take you to the species images on the USF Florida Plant Atlas website to help confirm your identification. Remember to take photos of the whole plant, top and bottom of leaves, bark, and if present, acorns and inside of acorn caps to add to your iNaturalist observations.

1. Leaves deeply lobed, at least halfway to the midrib or middle of leaf .....[Turkey oak-\*Quercus laevis\*](#)
1. Leaves only shallowly lobed or not lobed
  2. Leaves shallowly 3-lobed at the apex or top, broadest toward the tip
    3. Leaf blade generally pubescent or hairy on the lower surface, plants of dry, scrubby habitats.....[Chapman's oak-\*Quercus chapmanii\*](#)
    3. Blades glabrous or without hairs on the lower surface, plants generally of wet or disturbed habitats.....[Water oak-\*Quercus nigra\*](#)
  2. Leaves not lobed, broadest near the middle
    4. Plant a clonal shrub, spreading by underground stems, generally not more than 1.5 meters tall
      5. Leaves flat, occasionally with a few large, marginal teeth, acorn with a peduncle (a stem that supports the acorn) to 3.5 cm long.....[Dwarf live oak-\*Quercus minima\*](#)
      5. Leaves revolute (rolled backward at the margins), lacking teeth, acorns sessile or nearly so (lacking a peduncle).....[Running oak-\*Quercus pumila\*](#)
    4. Plant a tree or large solitary shrub
      6. Leaves revolute(rolled backward at the margins)
        7. Leaves usually oblong or long-oval, the upper surface somewhat rough, the lower surface densely but minutely gray-hairy.....[Sand live oak-\*Quercus geminata\*](#)
        7. Leaves usually oval, the upper surface smooth, the lower surface hairless or with rust-colored hairs
          8. Leaves strongly revolute, the leaves sometimes appearing rolled, twice as long as wide.....[Scrub oak-\*Quercus inopina\*](#)
          8. Leaves slightly revolute, rarely hairy underneath, only slightly longer than wide.....[Myrtle oak-\*Quercus myrtifolia\*](#)
  6. Leaves mostly flat, little to any rolling of the edges
    9. Leaves with few to no hairs on the underside.....[Laurel oak-\*Quercus laurifolia\*](#)
    9. Leaves sparsely to densely hairy underneath
      10. Top of leaves bluish or ashy-green.....[Bluejack oak-\*Quercus incana\*](#)
      10. Upper surface of leaves dark green
        11. Arms of the hairs on the lower leaf surface sticking up (use magnification).....[Sand live oak-\*Quercus geminata\*](#)
        11. Arms of the hairs on the lower leaf surface laying flat.....[Live oak-\*Quercus virginiana\*](#)