

General

In this leaflet we introduce the national tree of Cyprus (Golden oak: *Quercus alnifolia*), designated as such by decision of the Council of Ministers of the Republic on 1st February 2006, following a proposal submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment and a recommendation of the Department of Forests.

The need to specify a national tree

In reality there are no special reasons for a country to specify a national tree. It is rather a cultural and communication feature, since most countries in the world, have specified such national symbols. Indeed, some countries have specified a national bird and /or animal. Each country follows different procedures for the selection of these symbols, depending on the various cultures, the legislation and the expectations of the people in the respective



country. In some countries the procedure entails a sample referendum or questionnaire, in some other places it is carried out following consultations and approval by the parliament or even with a presidential decree. This action, is therefore, mostly a formality but it has at the same time an ecological, cultural and often historic significance.

Selection criteria

The selection of the national tree of Cyprus, was carried out following consultations, both with other competent state services as well as private researchers of the Cyprus flora. The main criteria and prerequisites taken into consideration for the selection of the national tree were:

- to be an endemic tree and preferably an endemic tree of Cyprus
- the botanical identity of the plant should be clarified
- it should not be specified as a national tree of another country
- it should have ecological, aesthetic, historic and scientific significance
- the tree should be known to the public and preferably be relatively widespread

Selection of the national tree, was rather difficult. Out of all the endemic species, the only endemic trees or tall shrubs were the Cyprus cedar and the golden oak (which can often be a low shrub but it can also be a small tree). The Cyprus golden oak

was finally chosen because ecologically it is more important for Cyprus, since it is one of the most significant elements of the forest landscape in the wider Troodos mountain range. Furthermore, the cedar has already been chosen by neighbouring Lebanon – the endemic Lebanon cedar – which is also depicted on the national flag of the neighbouring country.

THE NATIONAL TREE OF CYPRUS

The national tree of Cyprus is the endemic small tree or high shrub golden oak (*Quercus alnifolia* Poech).

Nomenclature

The genus name *Quercus* is derived from the ancient Latin name for the oak tree; the species has



been named *alnifolia* due to the similarity of its leaves with that of alder (*Alnus*). The common English name “golden oak” refers to the golden-yellow colour of the lower surface of leaves.

Description

Golden oak is an evergreen, small tree or large shrub up to 10 m high, usually much branched with a wide crown. Its leaves are simple, coriaceous, petiolate, and usually ovate with serrate margins. The upper surface of leaves is shining dark green and the lower surface densely golden or brownish-tomentose. The flowers are unisexual; the male catkins are greenish-yellow, forming spreading or pendulous clusters at the tips of the branches; the female are axillary, solitary or in groups of 2-3. Its fruit is a narrowly obovate or subcylindrical nut (acorn), with brown colour at maturity; the cupule, at the base of acorn, is closely covered with strongly recurved scales.

Habitat - Distribution

Golden oak occurs on igneous, rocky mountainsides from 400 to 1700 m. It flowers from April to May and the fruits ripen from November to

December. Occasionally, it can hybridise with kermes oak (*Quercus coccifera* subsp. *calliprinos*), producing rarely natural hybrids, known locally as *Lakopernies*.

Golden oak is an endemic species of Cyprus, restricted to the ophiolite rocks (igneous rocks) of the Troodos range where it dominates locally. It forms high maquis and participates as a main species in the understory vegetation of the pine forests. The most extensive formations (pure golden oak stands or mixed with *Pinus brutia*) occur in Pafos, Troodos, Adelfoi and Machaeras forests, at an altitude of 600 to 1600 m.

Ecological importance – Uses

Golden oak is a species of great ecological value due to its ability to colonise stony and rocky slopes (loose screes of diabase rocks), offering soil stabilisation against erosion; in addition, its fruits are excellent food for fauna. As a broadleaf species, it can readily regenerate after fire or felling, through coppicing.

The habitat type “Scrub and low forest vegetation of *Quercus alnifolia* (9390)” is a priority habitat of Annex I, Directive 92/43/EEC. Therefore, large forest expanses have been proposed for inclusion in the *Natura 2000* network, to protect, among others, the endemic forests of golden oak. In exceptional cases, golden oak attains dimensions of great trees, which are regarded as nature monuments. Its wood is excellent as firewood and suitable for the construction of tool handles and other small articles. Golden oak has an ornamental value and can be used in roadside plantations and gardens, in the submountainous and mountainous areas.

Protection status

Quercus alnifolia as a species is protected by the Forest Law. In addition, it is protected as a habitat type by the directive 92/43/EEC. The most extensive and important stands of *Quercus alnifolia* are found in state forest land and are adequately protected. The most important habitats of the species, both state forests and some private land, have been proposed as *Natura 2000* sites.



The National Tree of Cyprus



P.I.O. 171/2007 – 2.000

Published by the Press and Information Office

Printed: Zavallis Litho Ltd



MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT, FORESTRY DEPARTMENT

Webpage: www.moa.gov.cy/forest