

## Introduction

The Golden oak is an endemic shrub or small tree that belongs to the family Fagaceae. This family comprises eight genera and approximately 1.050 species.

The Golden oak belongs to the genus of oaks (*Quercus*) which consists of about 600 species with distribution in Europe, North Africa, Asia, North America and in the western areas of South America. Three species of oaks occur naturally in Cyprus, the Golden oak (*Q. alnifolia*), the Common oak (*Q. infectoria ssp. veneris*) and the Hermes oak (*Q. coccifera ssp. calliprinos*). A small number of other species was introduced in the past and planted in the squares of villages and cities. Among them are the *Q. ilex*, *Q. macrolepis* and *Q. macrocarpa*.



## Historical Context

The Golden oak was well-known by ancient authors and together with pines, cedars, planes, alders and other species of oak formed the very dense forests with which Cyprus was covered 10 thousand years ago.

According to Mr P. G. Madon the first Director of the Department of Forests, the Golden oak occurred in clumps throughout the greater part of the pine forests, sometimes wide apart, at other times so close as to form the mass of the standing crop and that from the point of view of the ground covered it held first rank after the Brutia pine.



## Description

The Golden oak is an evergreen shrub or small tree, occasionally up to 10m high, usually with many branches and a wide crown. The bark is grey and vertically fissured.



The leaves are thick, rigid, leathery and ovate, 1.5-6cm long, 1-5cm wide, with a rounded base and short acute tip. The upper part of the leaves are dark and shiny green and the lower part deep golden or brownish tomentose. The English name Golden oak is

derived from the golden colour of the lower part of its leaves.

The inflorescences are monoecious. The male inflorescences are in dense clusters at the tips of the branches. The female flowers are solitary or in groups of 2-3 in the leaf axils. The acorns are 2-2.5 cm long, 0.8-1-2 cm wide and sub-cylindrical. The cup of the acorn encloses one-sixth to one-quarter of it.

The wood is hard and durable and was used for wooden ploughs and carts. Nowadays it is used for tool-handles, for the production of charcoal and as fuel wood.

## Ecology

The Golden oak is found from elevations of 450m up to the highest peak of Troodos mountains on igneous formation mountain sides. It occurs in the forests of Paphos, Troodos, Adelphi, Machairas and Limassol.

The Golden oak is found mainly in the understory of the pine forest, together with the maple, strawberry tree, terebinth, hawthorn, hermes oak, sage, organum and others. In the Cedar valley it is observed in the understory of cedar forests.

In specific areas such as the area around Kykkos Monastery, at Madari and at Kionia in the Macheras forest, it occurs in pure stands together with the maple, the sage, the astragalus and the everlasting.

The ecological importance of the Golden oak is manifest since it occurs on steep, loose, scree slopes, as dense coppice thickets, important for stabilisation and the prevention of erosion. It is not destroyed after a fire since it sprouts very quickly covering the area again. It is a very significant species for wildlife since it offers food and cover to a great number of birds.



## Conservation and Management

The endemic Golden oak forests have been approved for inclusion in Annex I of the European Union Directive 92/43. The most representative forests of this species that occur in the forests of Macheras, Adelphi and Paphos have been proposed for inclusion in the Natura 2000 Network.

Some gigantic Golden oak trees like those growing at Gremmos tis Pellis along Kykkos-Stavros tis Psokas road, at Apliki, at Dkialis in Yalia forest and at Kardama near Amiantos are protected by the Forestry Department.

The largest among them is the Golden oak at Gremmos tis Pellis, with a girth at breast height of 3,50m.

Natural forests of the Golden oak should be protected and managed on a sustainable basis since they have been included as a priority habitat type in Appendix I of the Directive 92/43 EEC.

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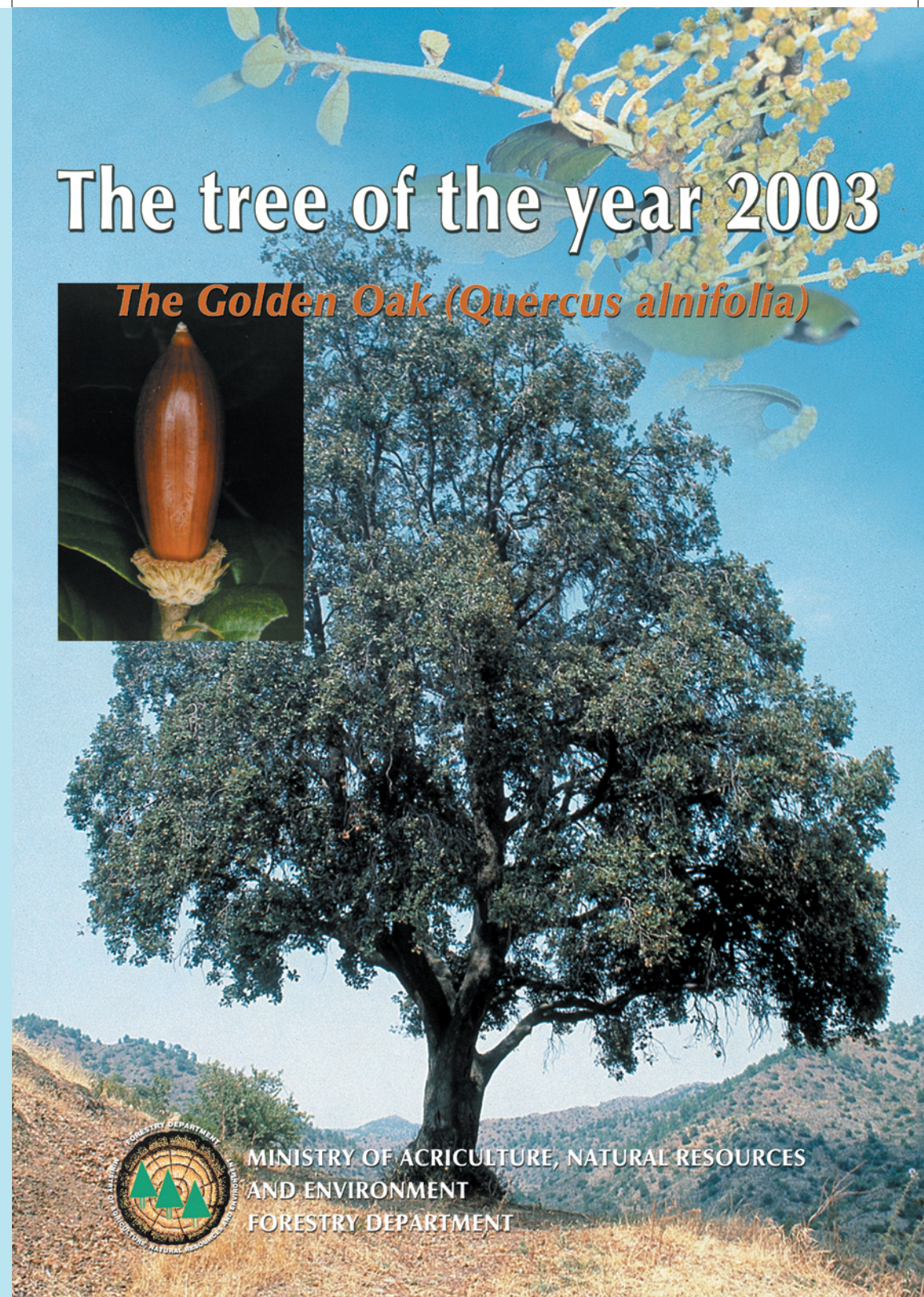


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# The tree of the year 2003

## The Golden Oak (*Quercus alnifolia*)



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