

Quercus inopina: the "unthought-of" oak from south central Florida

by Ann F. Johnson



Leaves of *inopina* oak (*Quercus inopina*).



Leaves of *myrtle* oak (*Quercus myrtifolia*).

field. Shrubs of *inopina* oak, with their sparse, vertically-held leaves and stout twigs, resemble a candlestick, while myrtle oaks, with their solid canopy of small leaves, have more of an umbrella shape.

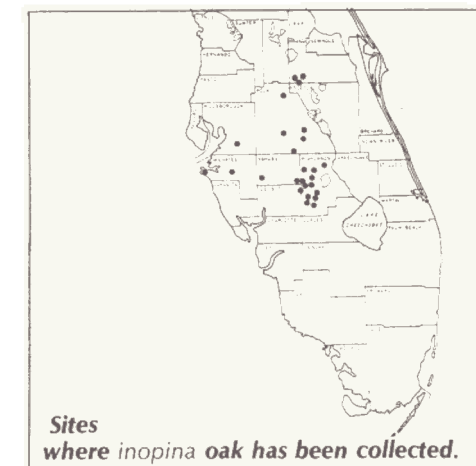
The range of *inopina* oak overlaps only the southernmost edge of the range of myrtle oak, which extends as far north as South Carolina. I have found *inopina* oaks primarily in the scrubs of Orange, Polk, and Highlands counties, with scattered western outliers in Hillsborough, Manatee, and Hardee counties.

Within its range *inopina* oak is often the dominant species in open, unshaded scrubs on white "sugar sands," while myrtle oaks prefer the partial shade of sand pines. Where the two grow together, as around Lake Annie in Highlands County, they do not hybridize, because myrtle oak completely finishes flowering in March, before *inopina* oak even begins in April.

W.W. Ashe 1929. "A new oak from Florida." *Rhodora* 31: 79-80.



Growth form of *inopina* oak.



Among the species of shrubby evergreen oaks making up the Florida scrub community, three are usually mentioned: Chapman's oak (*Quercus chapmanii*), twin live oak (*Q. geminata*), and myrtle oak (*Q. myrtifolia*).

However, there is a fourth, *Quercus inopina* (literally, "unthought-of" oak), described by W.W. Ashe in 1929 and included as a note in J.K. Small's *Manual of the Flora of the Southeastern U.S.*, ...and pretty much "unthought-of" by botanists since, who generally lump it with its close relative, myrtle oak.

Inopina oak can be distinguished from myrtle oak primarily by its leaves. These are larger (2" to 3" long), tougher, and fewer per twig than those of myrtle oak. They are also elliptical:



and the edges are rolled under, in contrast to the leaves of myrtle oaks, which are spatulate:



and usually flat. These characteristics give the two species quite a different aspect when seen side by side in the

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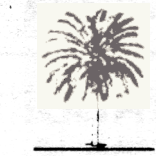
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