

***Quercus acuta* - Fagaceae**
Japanese Evergreen Oak

Japan is a formation of islands that are the tops of a volcanic mountain chain rising from the Pacific Ocean. Plants in Japan range from species adapted to subtropical rain forests and mangrove swamps in the south to species of subarctic forests and alpine moors in the north.

Japan is well populated with broadleaf evergreen plants. These species are mostly found in the temperate forest of the western regions of Japan, particularly Kyushu and Shikoku. But these forests are also found further north on the Sea of Japan side of Honshu, where the warm current and heavier snow cover along the Sea of Japan provide a more favourable climate for evergreen plants.

Japanese evergreen oak (*Quercus acuta*) is a small tree of the temperate forest of Japan, Korea and China. In the understory it makes an attractive layered species and in the sun a tall umbrella shape.

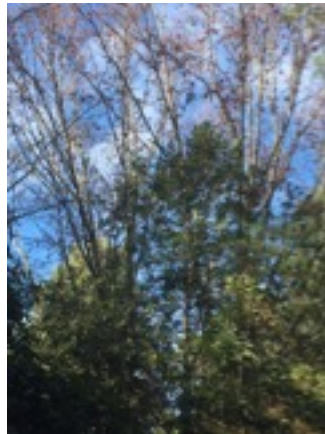
Japanese evergreen oak might grow in Korea and China, but it has the heart and history of the Japanese people. It grows slowly and steadily throughout the year. This gives it a tight grain, which is perfect for making practice swords in the martial arts. These wooden swords are called *bokken* and were used by samurai to train warriors. There was less chance of a serious injury when practicing, although bokken eventually became lethal weapons in the hands of a skilled expert.

But it is not just the martial arts that benefitted from Japanese evergreen oak. Right after the Second World War when food was scarce in Japan, the seeds of this oak were processed into flour. And today Japanese evergreen oak is being planted along with other native trees to create forests in tsunami damaged shrine grounds.

Japanese evergreen oak doesn't need a sword to defend itself. Its graceful bright shiny green leaves are described as drip-tipped. But its Latin species name *acuta* doesn't mince words - it means sharpened to a point. This helps each leaf to shed water during the rainy season and the high humidity in summer. There is less chance of fungus developing as well.

If you are thinking of growing Japanese evergreen oak, it is hardy from -15 to -20 C and is not frost tender. The species is monoecious (individual flowers being either male or female with both sexes found on the same plant) and wind pollinated. It can grow in semi-shade or no shade but prefers a moist soil. This evergreen oak can tolerate strong winds but not maritime exposure.

We have three *Quercus acuta* at VanDusen. The one in bed 123 is right behind the Monarch birch. The picture below was taken in November when the birch had already dropped its big leaves. The other tall and thriving oak is in the middle of bed 127D. And the third smaller one is nearby. The seeds were collected in Kyushu in the forest around Kyogadake and planted in 1980.



Quercus acuta - bed 123



practice swords made from its wood



drip-tipped leaves of *Q. acuta*

Sources:

Ornamental Plant Explorations Japan 1961 by John L Creech -
https://archive.org/stream/ornamentalplante3475cree/ornamentalplante3475cree_djvu.txt

<https://www.bartlett.com/blog/2018/08/tree-species/japanese-evergreen-oak>
<https://pfaf.org/user/Plant.aspx?LatinName=Quercus+acuta>
<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bokken>