

# *Terrestrial & Palustrine Plant Communities Of Pennsylvania*

By Jean Fike

## **Dry oak - heath woodland**

This community type occurs on dry, acidic soils. Dominant trees include *Quercus montana* (chestnut oak), *Q. coccinea* (scarlet oak), *Q. velutina* (black oak), *Nyssa sylvatica* (black-gum), *Sassafras albidum* (sassafras), *Betula lento* (sweet birch), *Betula populifolia* (gray birch), and *Acer rubrum* (red maple). *Pinus strobus* (eastern white pine) and *P. rigida* (pitch pine) or occasionally other dry-site pines may be present but contribute less than 25% of the tree stratum. The structure of the shrub layer is variable; it may be composed entirely of low shrubs like *Vaccinium angustifolium* (low sweet blueberry), *V. pallidum* (lowbush blueberry), *Gaylussacia baccata* (black huckleberry), and *Comptonia peregrina* (sweet-fern), or there may be an additional layer of taller shrubs like *Kalmia latifolia* (mountain laurel), *Quercus ilicifolia* (scrub oak), and *V. corymbosum* (highbush blueberry). Typical herbaceous species include *Pteridium aquilinum* (bracken fern), *Carex pensylvanica* (Pennsylvania sedge), *C. communis* (a sedge), *Oryzopsis* spp. (ricegrass), *Maianthemum canadense* (Canada mayflower), *Aralia nudicaulis* (wild sarsaparilla), *Gaultheria procumbens* (teaberry), and *Epigaea repens* (trailing arbutus). This type often occurs downslope adjacent to the "Pitch pine - mixed hardwood woodland" type, or along lower ridgetops or on other dry sites. This community may occur as part of the "Ridgetop acidic barren complex."

**Related types:** This type often occurs along a soil-moisture gradient between the "Pitch pine - mixed hardwood woodland" type and the "Dry oak - heath forest" type. It is distinguished from the former by a lack of substantial conifer component (less than 25% relative cover) and from the latter by having an open canopy (less than 40% cover by trees).

**Range:** Glaciated NE, Glaciated NW, Piedmont, Pittsburgh Plateau, Pocono Plateau, Ridge and Valley, Unglaciated Allegheny Plateau.

**Selected references:** Davis et al. 1990, 1991.

[**Crosswalk:** Smith's "Ridgetop Dwarftree Forest" (in part), TNC's *Quercus rubra* - *Quercus prinus* Woodland Alliance, SAF's parts of Chestnut oak (44), Northern red oak (55) and White oak - black oak- northern red oak (52).]