

# Gambel Oak

(Scrub Oak)



## Oak Family

*Quercus gambelii*

### ROCKY MOUNTAIN RELATIVES

None

### EASY IDENTIFICATION

Unique leaf; acorns in fall; grow on hot, dry hillsides



**Leaf** Gambel Oak leaves are easy to identify with their gently curving lobed shape.

**BIG AND SMALL** Gambel Oaks vary in size from dense shrubby thickets to 20-foot tall trees with trunks as thick as an adult's thigh and a leafy canopy that hangs over an adult's head. The dense thickets are created by cloning (one thicket growing from a single root system), from deer and elk grazing (see "clumping" below) and from growing in areas where water quickly evaporates or drains downhill. The taller trees occur in unburned areas and in flat meadows where water is able to settle into the soil.

**FIRE RESISTANT ROOTS** Forest fires burn frequently through Scrub Oak thickets, especially in October and November when dried leaves remain on the branches or collect on the ground. These fires burn quickly through a grove, but do not burn long enough in one area to get too hot. If the roots do not burn, new oak shrubs will grow immediately from the unharmed roots.

**CLUMPING** Dense oak thickets often look like they've been trimmed to one height. Gambel Oak branches are a favorite winter food for deer and elk and a herd can trim an entire hillside in one winter. When the tips of the branches are cut, the next year's growth occurs outward from the stem, rather than growing longer from the tip. The effect is a clump of growth at the top of each branch which creates a very dense thicket too thick to walk through.



### LAST LEAVES

These are the last of the lowland shrubs to turn green in spring and the last to change colors in fall.



### BEAR FOOD

Acorns are very important food for bears preparing for hibernation. Some years, acorns are very abundant and bears eat as many as they please. If, however, the catkins freeze in the spring, very few acorns grow in the fall and bears must seek other foods, often from dumpsters in towns.

### WORLDWIDE RELATIVES

There are 206 different Oak species, many of which grow as tall deciduous trees.



**Fire** Following a fire, new growth occurs quickly from unharmed roots.



**Acorns** Acorns grow in late summer and are an important food for bears and rodents.