



# Tree-mendous

The seaside alder is one of the state's most unique leafy treasures. By Silas Allen

**B**ESIDE STREAMS THAT cut through the rolling hills of southern Oklahoma sits one of the rarest varieties of tree in the world. The **Oklahoma seaside alder**—or *Alnus maritima oklahomensis*—is a subspecies of a plant that spread across most of North America several million years ago but now is found only in three regions: southern Oklahoma, the Georgia swamps, and the Delmarva Peninsula in the Northeast.

“We think it’s died out everywhere else, where maybe they just got lucky,” says Stanley Rice, a professor of biological sciences at Southeastern Oklahoma State University in Durant.

The tree thrives in those areas, forming big green jumbles along rivers and creeks.

“It establishes thick root clumps in the soil, allowing it to withstand floods, dry spells, or even wildfire,” Rice says.

One place to spot the tree is the Oka’ Yanahli Preserve, a 3,600-acre expanse along the Blue River run by The Nature Conservancy. Manager Jona Tucker says it’s one of the area’s highlights.

“We really are drawn to mysteries and things that are rare,” she says.

Arborists who don’t want to tramp through the forest may soon be able to see the seaside alder in a more comfortable environment. Todd Lasseigne, president of the Tulsa Botanic Garden, has traveled to the Blue River with Rice to collect samples. Propagating the tree through cuttings helps researchers get a

Male seaside alders produce long, thin catkins that release pollen in the fall, whereas females’ flowers cluster into a cone-like structure.

better idea of how it adapts to different environments. The garden’s nursery is growing saplings and monitoring their progress, and Lasseigne hopes to see them planted within the next two years.

“It’s a good fit for the garden, because it allows people to see a plant that thrives in Oklahoma and basically nowhere else in the world,” Lasseigne says. “It’s a really fascinating tree.”



The Oka’ Yanahli Preserve, located north of Tishomingo, is open by appointment only. (580) 777-2224. The Tulsa Botanic Garden, 3900 Tulsa Botanic Drive, (918) 289-0330 or tulsabotanic.org.