
A VISIT TO KALININGRAD, RUSSIA

by Eike Jablonski

After decades of rigorous restrictions upon travel through the former Soviet Union, "glasnost" and "perestroika" made it possible for me to visit many of the interesting and beautiful places in this country.

One of the oldest cities on the shores of the Baltic Sea is the city of Kaliningrad (until 1945 its name was Königsberg). German monks founded Königsberg as a monastery in the 13th Century due to its strategic importance. As early as 1544, the University was founded, which still exists today. Kaliningrad is also the capital of the Kaliningrad Republic, which is part of Russia today. Kaliningrad was and still remains the capital of culture in the whole region. Immanuel Kant, the well known philosopher, was born here and held his lessons at the University. In addition some famous botanists had been working at the University throughout its history.

Besides Kaliningrad, there are some smaller towns found within this tiny state, e.g. Baltijsk, Sovetsk and Cernjahov.

Kaliningrad is situated on the Bay of Gdansk, south of Lithuania. Besides the influence of the sea, the climate shows remarkable peculiarities:

- a harsh winter with temperatures below -20°C (-4°F)
- a long winter from November to March
- a short-term spring
- remarkable differences within the average temperatures in one month
- first frost sometimes the first week of September
- last frost temperatures between mid-April and mid-June
- average temperatures during the year are $7.0 - 7.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ (45°F)
- average rainfall is about 600mm (24 inches)

The two native oaks of Kaliningrad are *Quercus robur* and *Q. petraea*. Both of them can reach heights up to 25m (91ft) here and often have excellent trunks, which are highly valued for timber.

If one walks through the streets of Kaliningrad, one will notice the beautiful alleys of trees, of which many are planted with oaks. In addition to *Quercus robur*, you will be able to find its cultivar 'Fastigata', and also *Q. rubra* and *Q. palustris*.

Within the vicinity are many beautiful parks. One of the largest ones is the Park Kultur (culture park). Here one can find a large number of the two native species and also some cultivated species and forms. In many places the Turkish oak (*Q. cerris*) can be found and can reach a height of 20m (73ft). Also *Q. macranthera* is not rare, with some of these specimens more than 100 years old and 15-20m (55-73ft) tall. *Quercus bicolor* is found only in two locations, but these two specimens are fine ones with a height about 17m (62ft).

Another American oak, the bur oak, *Q. macrocarpa*, is planted quite frequently. Large specimens up to 21m (76 ft) can be found at the zoo, where, besides some Siberian tigers, one can trace a fine collection of cultivated trees.

In 1922 the German Dendrological Society held their annual meeting in Königsberg. They visited the zoological garden and wrote in their yearbook about the two *Quercus macrocarpa*, planted around 1895, when the zoo was first opened to the public. *Quercus imbricaria* is also listed in the report, but today cannot be found. The Hungarian (Italian) oak, *Q. frainetto*, still grows in some localities. In the report of the German dendrologists, there was also one specimen of *Quercus frainetto* x *Q. pubescens* found in the botanical garden. This hybrid does not remain today either. Some other listed species, such as *Q. mongolica*, *Q. libani*, *Q. pyrenaica*, or the evergreen *Quercus x turneri* 'Pseudoturneri', were all growing at the Botanical School Garden in 1922, but do not exist today. Perhaps this garden was destroyed in World War II or the trees were cut down for firewood afterwards.

Of the sessile oak, *Q. petraea*, a few forms are cultivated in Kaliningrad. One beautiful *Q. petraea* 'Mespilifolia' grows in the Park Kultur and reaches 17m(62ft). In the botanical garden of the University, two *Q. petraea* 'Laciniata', were planted around the turn of the Century and are now more than 17m tall. At the same place you will find *Q. petraea* ssp. *iberica*, one of the several subspecies of the sessile oak.

The English oak, *Q. robur*, has been in cultivation for centuries. As a result of selection (and breeding in a few cases), several dozen forms are existing. The zenith of the collection of cultivars was at the end of the last Century, when botanists, nurserymen and foresters collected every nontypical form they could find. At that time some nurseries had more than 100 forms of *Quercus robur* in cultivation.

Some of the old *Q. robur* cultivars still remain in Kaliningrad. The golden oak, *Quercus robur* 'Concordia', is well known for its golden (or very light green) foliage, but it is not supposed to be as hardy as the species. However, the fine specimen in Kaliningrad, 10m (36ft) tall and vigorous, has been withstanding the harsh winters for decades.

Quercus robur 'Cucullata' with spoon-like leaves is growing in a few places, one being Tubdispanzer Park in Primorsk, a small harbor town 20km (12 miles) west of Kaliningrad. Very similar to this one is *Quercus robur* 'Cucullata Macrophylla', of which trees up to 20m (73ft) can be found.

Quercus robur 'Fastigiata' and the similar, but more slender, 'Cupressoides', are growing in almost every park and in many old gardens. One specimen of *Quercus robur* 'Pectinata', a slow growing cultivar, grows in a small park and reaches a height of 10m (36ft) and is quite an old tree.



Quercus x turneri 'Pseudoturneri' (Camus)

In two localities one may glimpse the weeping oak, *Quercus robur* 'Pendula', which can be beautiful, but most of the cultivated 'Pendula' are not really "weeping" oaks. Often they look like a tree which does not know how to grow properly, and therefore, many of this form seem like a weak, simple oak. There are, however, a few good forms grafted from good material, and one of them with good form is in the center of Svetlij.

One of the rare cultivars is *Quercus robur* 'Umbraculifera'. In the Netherlands it was cultivated before 1879, but nowadays it is seldom seen. A fine specimen grows in Sovetsk, northeast of Kaliningrad on the border of Lithuania in their Park Kultur. This form has a round-shaped branching habit.

This is only a glimpse of the many oaks that grow in and around Kaliningrad, which was closed a long time to visitors. Furthermore, not only will you see interesting oaks, but also friendly people everywhere. ☘

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