

**NATIVE PLANTS ASSOCIATED WITH SUDDEN OAK DEATH (SOD) AND THEIR USE BY CALIFORNIA INDIANS – FACT SHEET No. 19**

The plant disease caused by a fungus-like microorganism, Phytophthora ramorum, is referred to as “Sudden Oak Death” because of its association with premature death in tanoak trees. This disease occurs in Northern California wildlands and affects several native California plants, including California Bay Laurel. Susceptible plants can become infected through exposure to water borne infective agents via rainfall, splash or drainage. In addition to natural spread of the disease, it can also be transmitted by human transport of infected plants and their parts to susceptible new plants in the environment. Good cultural practices and restrictions on the movement of infected material can minimize the risk of spreading the disease. For more information, please refer to website links for the U.S. Department Of Agriculture/Plant Protection And Quarantine ([www.aphis.usda.gov/ppq/ispm/pramorom/](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ppq/ispm/pramorom/)), the California Department Of Food And Agriculture ([www.cdffa.ca.gov](http://www.cdffa.ca.gov)), the California Oak Mortality Task Force (<http://nature.berkeley.edu/comtf>), or contact your local County Department Of Agriculture.

Common Name: California Bay Laurel  
Pepperwood  
Oregon Myrtle

Scientific Name: Umbellularia californica



Photo courtesy of Virginia Tech Forestry Dept.

Cahto Name:	antcing (pepperwood, peppernut)
Concow Maidu Name:	sō ē' bā
Karuk Name:	pahiip
Kashaya Pomo Name:	behem? (peppernut tree) hat (bay laurel fruit) qalam? (fleshy end of the fruit husk) behe (kernel)
Nomlaki Name:	bok
Pomo Name:	bā hem' (the tree), ba he' (nut)
Tongva Name:	takape kakaaka
Wappo Name:	cuse (chu'shey)
Yuki Name:	pōl' cum (nuts), pōl' cum ōl (the tree), po kum pooma ol
Yurok Name:	wohkelo' mego'oh (peppernuts)

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### Past and present possible tribal uses.

Cahuilla: The leaves were used to treat headaches.

Concow Maidu: Root bark was used to make a beverage.

Costanoan: Burning-leaf smoke was used to repel fleas. Fruits were eaten raw or boiled, the kernels roasted or ground into flour for cakes. Burning-leaf smoke was also used to drive ground squirrels from their burrows. Fresh leaves were hung in bunches as an air freshener.

Karuk: An infusion of the plant was used by women for the pains of afterbirth. The plant was used in steambaths or burning boughs were used to fumigate houses for colds or other sicknesses. A poultice of ground seeds was used to treat sores. Seeds were shelled, roasted and eaten or stored for winter use. Leaves were thrown into fires, by children, to hear them crack like firecrackers. Foliage was placed on a fire during the Brush Dance to drive evil spirits away.

Mendocino Indians: A decoction of the plant was used as a wash for head lice and taken for headaches and stomachaches. A poultice of leaves was applied for headaches and as a counterirritant for chronic stomach problems. An infusion of leaves was used as a bath for rheumatism. Burning leaf vapor was used for many diseases. Leaves were used as a flea repellent and the nuts eaten as a stimulant. The nuts were roasted, shelled and eaten, or pounded and molded into bread. They were also made into a relish.

Miwok: A poultice of leaves and twigs were bound to the head to treat headache.

Ohlone: Leaves were placed on the head and stomach to treat aches. Leaves were burned, in homes, to treat colds.

Pomo: A poultice of heated leaves was used for rheumatic and neuralgic pains. Sometimes an Indian doctor would hit a patient with little branches, while the doctor sang, to treat pain, headache or colds. A decoction of leaves was taken for colds, menstrual cramps and clotting, sore throats and congestion. It was also used as a wash for sores. Peppernut charcoal was used to groom moustaches. Leaves were rubbed on the body, before hunting, to hide human odor. Small, leafy branches were hung in houses to ward off harm and the plant was used in many ceremonies. The nuts were eaten raw, or they were roasted and eaten, or sun-dried. Pounded kernel meal was used to make sun-dried, flat cakes that were stored for winter use. Roasted kernels or kernel cakes were eaten with greens, buckeye meal, acorn meal, mush or seaweed. The plant was used prominently in secret tribal ceremonies. Kashaya Pomo women were not allowed to touch pepperwoods, or the branches, or even go near gathering grounds, for fear of ruining the trees.

Tolowa: The nuts were shelled, roasted and eaten.

Tongva: Headaches were treated by binding leaves to the head, crushing leaves into small tubes placed in the nostrils, or with a tea made from the leaves. Leaves were bound to the abdomen for stomachaches. Menstrual cramps were treated with a decoction of cooked leaves, and rheumatism was treated with an infusion of leaves in a bath. Oil from the leaves was made into a decoction to cool the skin and repel insects. A poultice of seeds was used to treat sore muscles and a poultice of flowers was used to reduce swelling. Wet branches were burned and the smoke was used to purify areas where people had been sick. The fruit was eaten after being roasted, crushed, and pounded into small cakes. Burls were carved into bowls.

Yuki: The nuts were roasted in hot ashes and stirred with a stick. After the ashes were sifted off, the nuts were cracked open and eaten. The nuts were gathered in November and the green flesh and yellow butt-tips were considered very tasty. When raw the meat is yellow but turns brown when thoroughly roasted. A poultice of crushed leaves was applied as a compress for headaches. Crushed leaves were inhaled for headaches and as a nasal decongestant. A decoction of leaves was used as a wash for rheumatism. Leafy branches were used to repel fleas.

Yurok: Seeds were baked in the sand under a fire and used for food. The plant was used for unspecified medicinal purposes. The plant was put under beds to repel fleas. Leaves were burned to dispel bad luck in the home, or the smoke was waved over people as they left. Leaves were placed between the layers of dried salmon to repel insects.