



Sudden Oak Death 5th Science Symposium

LOCAL COFFEE / CHOCOLATE



California Bay Laurel

The nuts of this tree are edible when roasted and have long been consumed by California Tribal groups as a condiment, digestive aid, and stimulant. Bay nuts contain a chemical constituent similar to caffeine. Regarding their stimulating properties, their effects have been described as edgier than caffeine, but shorter lived. The nuts contain 40-60% of a waxy fat which behaves very much like cocoa butter.

Processing bay nuts step-by-step

1. Harvest bay nuts
2. Peel off the fruit
3. Dry the nuts
4. Crack open the outer shell
5. Roast the nuts



1. The nuts are **harvested** in the fall (October through November here), when they drop from the trees of their own accord. Select nuts that have not sat on the ground too long, judging by the condition of the fleshy outer husk.
2. **Peel** off the outer fruit from the nuts soon after harvesting, before the variously colored fleshy coatings begin to wither and rot.
3. **Dry** the nuts in their shells on a baking sheet in the oven at 350° for about 10-15 minutes – or until they start cracking open. If you can't roast the nuts right away, wipe the fruit remnants from the nuts and store dry and uncovered.
4. Remove the nuts from the oven and **crack** the shells open with a nutcracker.
5. Place the nut meat (near translucent beige colored flesh that easily breaks in half, similar to peanuts) back on the baking sheets and return to the oven to **roast** for 30-45 minutes, stirring occasionally – some sources suggest every few minutes, but this is when roasting at higher heats, up to 450°. We stirred closer to every ten minutes. The bay nuts will turn darker and darker shades of brown, from tan to the color of milk chocolate to dark chocolate, and eventually to a black-brown (overdone); a tasty roasted bay nut is a dark chocolate brown. The essential oils remaining in bay nuts that have not been roasted long enough make them quite pungent and inedible, whereas if roasted until too dark, the nuts become bitter and reminiscent of charcoal. Bay nuts can cross the line from underdone to overdone quickly, and should be checked on frequently once they reach a medium shade of brown. Remove from the oven as soon as the average nut seems to be the right color – that of a cup of coffee with some cream in it.

Roasted bay nuts can be stored in an airtight container for months. Alone, they taste like a cross between a coffee bean and cacao bean, and are quite tasty mixed with a little sweetener such as honey or agave nectar. You can also grind the nuts in a coffee grinder and steep the powder in hot water to make a cross between coffee and hot chocolate (again, this is recommended sweetened) or use the powder as you would cacao powder to make a local “chocolate.”

****Today's bay nuts were tossed in tan oak honey and sprinkled with sea salt.****