

Our Arroyo Ecosystem



Coast Live Oak

Quercus agrifolia

The Coast Live Oak is an evergreen tree that grows in well-drained soils and is adapted to a Mediterranean-type climate, with fairly warm wet winters and dry summers. It provides habitat for a great diversity of insects, birds, and mammals.

Animals consume a high percentage of its acorns, which also helps the oak to disperse. For instance, scrub jays are known to cache up to 5,000 acorns each year. Up to 95% of these seeds will be found and eaten, but the remaining acorns are much more likely to germinate than those that remain above ground.

Acorns from this oak were a staple of the Chumash diet, and were preferred over other acorns because of their high nutritional value. Acorns are very bitter to taste unless they are leached. The Chumash would grind them into very fine flour using a mortar and pestle, then spread it to a thickness of about 1" in a finely woven basket or into a depression of sand lined with leaves. Water was then poured over the flour several times until the bitterness was removed. The resulting mush was then stirred with a hot stone at the end of a stick. It would be eaten without salt, often with fish or other meat. Often, Chumash doctors would prescribe acorn mush to the sick as part of a special diet. The oak's bark and oak galls were also used medicinally. As an aid to indigestion, green bark was burned until it made charcoal, then was mixed with water and allowed to sit overnight. Liquid from the galls was used to treat boils and wounds. Oak was also chewed to clean teeth and to make them strong.

The Coast Live Oak is used for rehabilitation projects to improve the watershed and for wildlife recovery.

For more information about the Coast Live Oak, check out the Calflora site at http://www.calflora.org/cgi-bin/species_query.cgi?where-taxon=Quercus+agrifolia

For more about the uses of Californian plants by Native Americans, check out http://arboretum.ucsc.edu/pdfs/ethnobotany_webversion.pdf

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