

PLANT ID GUIDE

California Native Traditional Foods



CALIFORNIA
INDIAN
MUSEUM
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INTRODUCTION TO THIS GUIDE:

THIS PLANT IDENTIFICATION GUIDE WAS CREATED TO SUPPORT TRIBAL COMMUNITIES TO RECOGNIZE TRADITIONAL PLANTS AND THEIR USE IN COMMON FOODS. PLEASE NOTE THIS IS AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE TO 12 TRADITIONAL FOODS. IT IS NOT AN OFFICIAL PLANT IDENTIFICATION GUIDE.

BEFORE GATHERING A NEW PLANT, ALWAYS ENSURE THAT IT IS THE CORRECT PLANT TO AVOID POSSIBLE ADVERSE HEALTH IMPACTS DUE TO INGESTING A MISIDENTIFIED PLANT. ALWAYS KEEP IN MIND THAT IT IS IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER WHETHER PESTICIDES HAVE BEEN SPRAYED IN THE REGION AS THIS WILL IMPACT YOUR EXPOSURE TO TOXINS IN THE ENVIRONMENT.

HARVEST SEASON ICON KEY:

SPRING



SUMMER



FALL



WINTER



BRODIAEA

Brodiaea Californica



WHAT: BRODIAEA IS A PERENNIAL HERB THAT IS OFTEN CHARACTERIZED BY ITS BEAUTIFUL LAVENDER FLOWERS. IT COMMONLY GROWS IN AREAS WITH LOW MOISTURE AND A GOOD SUNLIGHT. IT IS COMMONLY FOUND IN BUTTERFLY GARDENS. IT FORMS AN IMPORTANT STARCH SOURCE THAT IS VITAL TO THE DIET OF MANY CALIFORNIA NATIVE PEOPLE. THIS PLANT IS KNOWN AS THE INDIAN POTATO BY CALIFORNIA TRIBAL COMMUNITIES.

WHERE: IT IS LOCATED IN OPEN, GRASSY PLACES SOMETIMES WITH GRAVELLY CLAY.

WHEN: READY TO HARVEST IN MAY, BUT FLOWERING SEASON GOES WELL INTO SPRING/SUMMER.

NATIVE USES: IT IS TYPICALLY COLLECTED IN LARGE QUANTITIES BEFORE, DURING, OR AFTER FLOWERING DEPENDING ON THE DESIRED TASTE PREFERENCE, THE BULBS ARE EDIBLE.

SPRING SUMMER

HARVEST SEASON:



BUCKEYE

Aesculus Californica



WHAT: BUCKEYE IS A SHRUB OR SMALL TREE THAT CAN BE FOUND THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE STATE. THEIR LEAVES ARE A DARK GREEN SHADE AND HAVE FIVE LEAFLETS. BUCKEYE IS AN EXTREMELY IMPORTANT NECTAR SOURCE TO BUTTERFLIES, BUT THEIR FLOWERS ARE POISONOUS TO HONEY BEES. IN THEIR RAW STATE, THE SEEDS CAN BE POISONOUS TO HUMANS IF INGESTED.

WHERE: THEY ARE LOCATED IN DRY SLOPES, CANYONS, OR STREAM EDGES, MOST OFTEN IN THE COAST RANGES OR SIERRA FOOTHILLS.

WHEN: THEY ARE READY TO HARVEST THROUGHOUT FALL.

NATIVE USES: TRADITIONALLY USED FOR: MEDICINE, TO STUPEFY OR KILL FISH, FOOD, AND FOR SPINDLES IN FIRE MAKING KITS.

HARVEST SEASON:



BLACK OAK

Quercus Kelloggi



WHAT: BLACK OAK IS AN OAK TREE THAT CAN GROW BETWEEN 30 AND 80 FEET TALL AND UP TO 4.5 FEET IN DIAMETER. ONE CAN DISTINGUISH A BLACK OAK TREE BY ITS DEEPLY LOBED LEAVES AND RELATIVELY LARGE ACORNS. THEY CAN LIVE TO BE 500 YEARS OLD BUT ARE EXTREMELY VULNERABLE TO SUDDEN OAK DEATH. THEY ARE CONSIDERED THE OAK TREE WITH THE MOST DESIRABLE ACORNS BY NATIVE AMERICANS IN CALIFORNIA.

WHERE: IT IS LOCATED IN SLOPES AND VALLEYS BETWEEN 2,000 AND 8,000 FEET IN: THE COAST RANGES, TRANSVERSE RANGE, PENINSULAR RANGE, AND LOWER ELEVATIONS OF THE SIERRAS.

WHEN: ACORNS ARE READY TO HARVEST IN THE EARLY FALL WHEN LEAVES ARE JUST TURNING BROWN.

NATIVE USES: TRADITIONAL USES INCLUDE: SOUP, MUSH BREAD, MEDICINE, DYES, UTENSILS, GAMES, TOYS, AND CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS.

HARVEST SEASON:



ELDERBERRY

Sambucus Nigra ssp. Caerulea



WHAT: ELDERBERRY IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT FOOD SOURCES FOR BIRDS. THEY CAN BE FOUND ALL THE WAY FROM OREGON TO BAJA. NEW GROWTH CAN BE FATAL TO LIVESTOCK DUE TO GLUCOSIDE. THEY GROW TIGHT AND RAPIDLY. THEY HAVE CREAM OR YELLOW FLOWERS IN THE SPRING, FOLLOWED BY DELICIOUS PURPLE BERRIES IN THE FALL.

WHERE: LOCATED IN STREAM BANKS, SLOPE BOTTOMS, CANYONS, AND SLIGHTLY MOISTER PLACES THROUGHOUT THE STATE.

WHEN: THEY ARE READY TO HARVEST IN MIDSUMMER TO EARLY FALL.

NATIVE USES: THE BERRIES, LEAVES, AND FLOWERS ARE USED FOR FOOD, MEDICINE, AND DYES. TWIGS AND WOOD ARE USED FOR MEDICINE, ARROW SHAFTS, AND MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS.

SUMMER FALL

HARVEST SEASON:



CHOKECHERRY

Prunus Virginiana



WHAT: CHOKECHERRY GROWS IN SHRUBS OR SMALL TREES AND CAN BE FOUND ALMOST THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRETY OF NORTH AMERICA, EXCEPT THE DEEP SOUTH AND FAR NORTH. THE COLOR OF THEIR FRUIT VARIES FROM RED TO BLACK. IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT WHEN UNRIPE, THEIR FRUIT CAN CONTAIN A SMALL AMOUNT OF CYANIDE. THE DARKER THE BERRY, THE LESS CYANIDE THEY CONTAIN. CHOKECHERRY ATTRACTS BIRDS, BEES, AND BUTTERFLIES.

WHERE: THEY ARE LOCATED ON ROCKY SLOPES.

WHEN: READY TO HARVEST IN LATE SPRING TO SUMMER.

NATIVE USES: TRADITIONAL USES INCLUDE: RAW, JELLIES, JAMS, SYRUP, OR PUDDING, INNER BARK IS MEDICINAL, SEEDS ARE USED FOR JEWELRY, TWIGS, AND BRANCHES ARE USED FOR ARROW SHAFTS, CRADLEBOARDS, AND OTHER HOUSEHOLD ITEMS.

SPRING SUMMER

HARVEST SEASON:



NARROWLEAF CATTAIL

Typha Angustifolia



WHAT: NARROWLEAF CATTAIL IS A PERENNIAL HERB THAT GROWS THROUGHOUT CALIFORNIA. ALL PARTS ARE EDIBLE WHEN GATHERED AT THE RIGHT STAGE OF GROWTH. THEY ARE FAST GROWING AND REQUIRE FULL SUN EXPOSURE. THEY ARE SUPPORTED BY BUTTERFLIES AND HAVE A SPRING FLOWERING SEASON.

WHERE: THEY ARE LOCATED IN DRY GRANITIC SLOPES AND RIDGES.

WHEN: THEY ARE READY TO HARVEST MID TO LATE SPRING, HARVEST WHEN IMMATURE BEFORE THEY ARE DRY.

NATIVE USES: TRADITIONAL USES INCLUDE: BEDDING MATERIALS, HOUSING MATERIALS, CLOTHING, AND DIAPERS. BOTH THE YOUNG SHOOTS AND YOUNG FLOWER HEADS ARE ALSO EDIBLE.

SPRING

HARVEST SEASON:



ONION

Allium sp.



WHAT: WILD ONION HAS A SPRING SUMMER FLOWERING SEASON. EACH SMALL BULB PRODUCES UP TO 10 50 FLOWERS. THEY ARE COMMONLY FOUND IN BEE GARDENS AS THEY ATTRACT BOTH BEES AND BUTTERFLIES. THEY REQUIRE FULL SUN EXPOSURE TO GROW.

WHERE: THEY ARE LOCATED IN THE WOODS, IN CLAY SOIL.

WHEN: HARVEST TIME IS SPRING AND EARLY SUMMER.

NATIVE USES: THE BULBS AND LEAVES OF ONIONS ARE USED FOR FOOD. IN ADDITION, THE LEAVES CAN ALSO BE EATEN AS A SNACK.

HARVEST SEASON:

SPRING SUMMER



PINYON

Pinus Monophylla



WHAT: PINYONS ARE MEDIUM SIZED TREES WITH A SLOW GROWTH RATE. THEY ARE COMMONLY FOUND IN THE SIERRAS, TRANSVERSE RANGE, AND PENINSULAR RANGE. THEY PRODUCE THE LARGEST CONES OF THE TRUE PINYONS.

WHERE: THEY ARE LOCATED ON ROCKY SLOPES.

WHEN: THEY ARE READY TO HARVEST IN EARLY SUMMER.

NATIVE USES: THE TREE IS USED AS FUEL WOOD. THE PINE NUTS ARE USED FOR FOOD OR JEWELRY. YOU CAN ALSO MELT PINYON PITCH AS A WATERTIGHT APPLICATION FOR BASKETS AND POTTERY VESSELS.

SUMMER

HARVEST SEASON:



STRAWBERRY

Fragaria Vesca



WHAT: THE WOODLAND STRAWBERRY CAN BE FOUND PRIMARILY IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA. IT CAN BE IDENTIFIED BY ITS SMALL WHITE FLOWERS WITH FIVE PETALS AND ITS BUSH LIKE FORM. ITS BERRIES ARE SMALL AND JUICY. THEY CAN BE EATEN RAW. THIS PLANT ALSO ATTRACTS BUTTERFLIES.

WHERE: THEY ARE LOCATED IN THE WOODLANDS.

WHEN: THEY ARE READY TO HARVEST IN THE SPRING.

NATIVE USES: THEY ARE COMMONLY GATHERED AND EATEN FRESH.

HARVEST SEASON:

SPRING



TAN OAK

Notholithocarpus Densiflorus



WHAT: TAN OAK CAN BE FOUND THROUGHOUT CALIFORNIA AND OREGON. IT CAN BE IDENTIFIED BY ITS SMALL WHITE FLOWERS AND WAVY TOOTH BORDERED LEAVES. LIKE MANY OTHER OAK SPECIES, THEY HAVE A FLOWERING SEASON IN SUMMER AND FALL AS WELL AS A WINTER DORMANCY. THEY CAN REACH UP TO 130 FEET TALL AND 6 FEET WIDE. TAN OAK IS ONE OF THE OAK SPECIES MOST SERIOUSLY AFFECTED BY SUDDEN OAK DEATH.

WHERE: THEY ARE LOCATED IN THE FORESTS OF THE COAST RANGES AND SIERRAS.

WHEN: THEY ARE READY TO HARVEST IN EARLY FALL WHEN LEAVES ARE JUST TURNING BROWN.

NATIVE USES: THE ACORNS ARE USED FOR FOOD TRADITIONALLY (SOUP, MUSH, OR BREAD).

HARVEST SEASON:



TULE

Schoenoplectus Tabernaemontani



WHAT: TULE GROWS IN MOIST AND WET ENVIRONMENTS, TYPICALLY NEAR BODIES OF WATER. IT CAN GROW ANYWHERE BETWEEN 3 TO 8 FEET. THE STALKS OF TULE ARE KNOWN TO BE BUOYANT AS THEY FLAT ATOP WATER. TULE IS EXTREMELY ABUNDANT AND CAN BE FOUND IN ALL 50 STATES, INCLUDING HAWAII AND VARIOUS REGIONS OF CANADA.

WHERE: THEY ARE LOCATED IN MARSHES, LAKES, AND STREAMBANKS.

WHEN: THEY ARE READY TO HARVEST IN LATE SUMMER WHEN THE TIPS OF THE TULE BEGIN TO DIE BACK.

NATIVE USES: TRADITIONALLY STEMS AND STALKS ARE USED IN: BASKETS, BOATS, DECOYS, ROPE, BEDDING, CLOTHING, AND HOUSING MATERIALS. TULE CAN ALSO BE EATEN BY STRIPPING AWAY THE OUTER BARK. THE YOUNG SHOOTS AND SPROUTS CAN BE EATEN AS WELL.

SUMMER

HARVEST SEASON:



WOOD ROSE

Rosa Woodsii



WHAT: THE WOOD ROSE CAN BE FOUND THROUGHOUT CALIFORNIA, TYPICALLY IN THE MOUNTAINOUS REGIONS. IT IS A FAST GROWING SHRUB WITH BEAUTIFUL PINK FLOWERS. IT ATTRACTS MANY BIRDS AND USUALLY GROWS IN HIGHLY ELEVATED PLACES WITH AN ABUNDANT AMOUNT OF MOISTURE.

WHERE: IT IS LOCATED IN MOIST PLACES AND ON STREAM BANKS OF HIGHER ELEVATIONS.

WHEN: THEY ARE READY TO HARVEST IN THE LATE SPRING.

NATIVE USES: EVERY PART OF THIS PLANT CAN BE CONSUMED INCLUDING THE: ROOTS, STEMS, LEAVES, FLOWERS, AND FRUITS OF ROSE. THE INNER BARK AND ROOTS CAN ALSO BE USED MEDICINALLY.

SPRING

HARVEST SEASON:



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

