

# Native Plants And Their Uses



## **What is a Native Plant?**

California's native plants evolved here over a very long period of time. They are the foundation of our ecosystems, or natural communities.

The Ohlone had a deep respect for and knowledge of these plants, and depended on them for their survival. They had special ways of managing the land and tending to the plants to ensure their health and abundance. Today, this knowledge is being passed down and practiced by modern descendants of the Ohlone known as the Amah Mutsun.

## Elderberry



The Ohlone made clapper sticks, whistles, and flutes out of the elderberry bush. Elderberry was also used to help start fires as a hearth board or spindle. The Awaswas word for elderberry is *chishsha*.



# Oak



Oak trees provided acorns, a very important food for the Ohlone. The strong wood could also be used to make tools. The young shoots of this tree were used to make looped cooking sticks for stirring hot rocks in cooking baskets.





## Willow



Willow branches are bendy and strong. They were used to make the structure of their houses and to weave a variety of baskets.



## Tule



Tule was used to make houses, boats, baskets, sitting mats, and rope. It grows in water and is an abundant plant in Santa Cruz. The Awaswas word for Tule is *rookosh*.





## Manzanita



Manzanita berries were harvested for food, as well as to make a delicious cider. The bark was used to make a tea to help the bladder and kidneys. In Spanish manzanita means “little apple”, which describes the berries on this plant.



## Soap Root



Soap Root was used to make brushes to separate acorn shells from their acorn flour. The bulbs could be cooked and eaten as a food source. It was also used to make soap!





## Buckeye



The fruit from this plant contains a poison that was used to stun fish. A medicine was made from the bark that could help cure toothaches. The soft wood was used as a plank for fire-making.

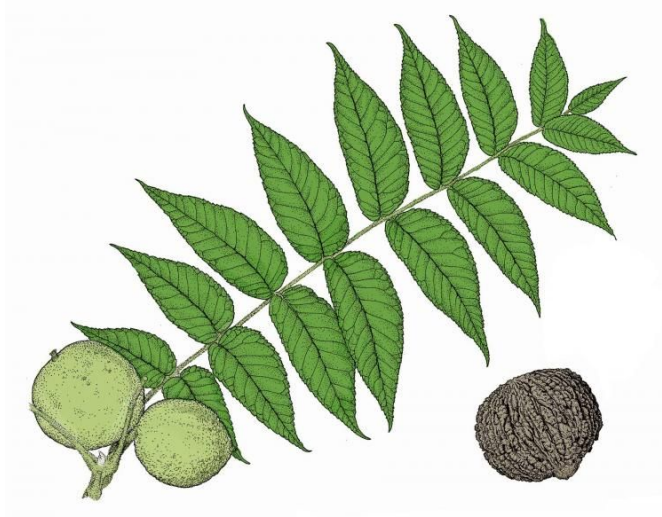


## California Blackberry



Blackberries were collected for food. The berries on this thorny bush turn a dark purple when they are ripe. This plant is often confused for Poison Oak but the leaves of this plant are fuzzy and the vine has thorns. Poison Oak has shiny leaves and no thorns.

## California Black Walnut



The nuts of this tree were collected, cracked open, and eaten. They taste similar to the English Walnut, which is commonly sold in grocery stores today.





## California Bay Laurel



The ripened nuts of these trees were removed from their shells and eaten after they were roasted to release their bitter flavor.



## Huckleberry



The fruit of this bush was gathered and eaten raw.  
The berries both taste and look like small  
blueberries!

## Yerba Buena



The leaves of this plant were harvested and used as a medicine. A tea was made with the leaves to help stomach aches. This plant is also called Wild Mint.



## Wild Strawberry



This plant produces small, sweet, and nutritious berries that resemble strawberries one might find in stores today. The leaves were made into a tea that is high in vitamin C.

## Miner's Lettuce

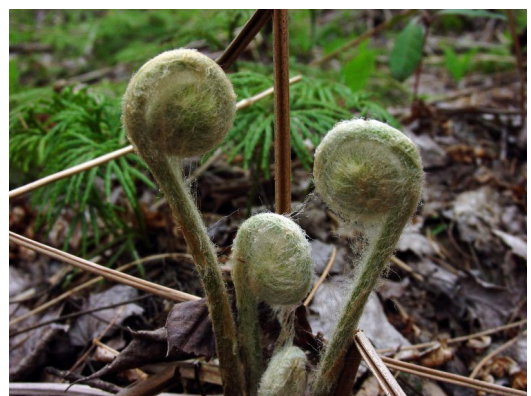


The leaves of this plant were eaten raw in the early spring when the plant was tender, and boiled or steamed later in the season. All parts of the plant are edible, including the stems and flowers.

## Bracken Fern



This large, bushy fern was used for many purposes by the Ohlone. Young curled-up fronds called fiddleheads could be cooked or eaten raw. The large fronds were sometimes used as roofing material for houses. The roots were used to create black designs in basket weaving.





## Chia



The seeds of Chia were collected for food and are highly nutritious. They could also be used to thicken soups because when they are soaked in water they become jelly-like.



## Yarrow



This plant has feathery-soft leaves and small clusters of white flowers. It was used medicinally to treat wounds, stop bleeding, and to help with stomach aches.