

## Chumash Uses of Selected Native Plants – Notes for SBBG Docents

### Plant Family Name in Caps

#### California Bay (*Umbellularia californica*)

LAURACEAE

- burls used to make wooden bowls
- leaves boiled in water to make medicinal remedies for diarrhea
- used to cure headache
- used to repel fleas
- as flavoring for food
- in northern California, the fruits were eaten and the seeds roasted and ground into flour

#### Cattail (*Typha* sp.)

TYPHACEAE

- bread made from powdered dried cattail rhizomes; balls of dough baked in hot ashes
- boiled cattail spikes like corn
- made thin uncooked mush from pollen
- stems and leaves used like tule for thatching

#### Chia Sage (*Salvia columbariae*)

LAMIACEAE

- seeds harvested for food, toasted and ground, water was added and people drank the mixture
- seeds used to clear the eyes
- seeds used as a poultice for wounds

#### Coffeeberry (*Frangula californica*)

RHAMNACEAE

- bark for laxative
- leaves for poison oak remedy

#### Cottonwood

SALICACEAE

(Fremont Cottonwood = *Populus fremontii*)

(Black Cottonwood = *Populus trichocarpa*)

- poles for house construction
- wood used to make bowls
- cottonwood fiber to make skirts
- bark and leaves used to make medicinal teas and washes

#### Blue Elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*)

ADOXACEAE

- branches used to make musical instruments: clapper sticks and flutes
- fruit used for food
- flowers for medicinal uses
- Note: most parts of this plant are toxic
- bows to hunt small animals

#### Giant Wild-Rye (*Leymus condensatus*)

POACEAE

- dried stems for arrow shafts for birds and small game
- used for smoking tobacco
- stems cut and sharpened for cane knives
- handles for paintbrushes
- for house thatching

#### Horsetail, Scouring Rush (*Equisetum* sp.)

EQUISETACEAE

- rough stems have high silica content
- Chumash used dry stems to polish wooden bowls
- other California Indian groups used *Equisetum* sp. to polish arrows and woodwork
- medicinal use

- Indian-Hemp** (*Apocynum cannabinum*) APOCYNACEAE
- the most important fiber of the Chumash
  - used for fishing lines and nets
  - to lash plank canoes
  - to make carrying nets and bags
- Santa Cruz Island Ironwood** (*Lyonothamnus floribundus* subsp. *aspleniifolius*) ROSACEAE
- strong wood used for harpoons
  - wood preferred for canoe paddle shafts
- Lemonade Berry and Sugar Bush** (*Rhus* sp.) ANACARDIACEAE
- Berries were pounded, dried in the sun and eaten without cooking
  - Other California Native Americans soaked fruits in water to make a beverage (e.g., Cahuilla)
- Manzanita** (*Arctostaphylos* sp.) ERICACEAE
- berries were dried, ground and eaten as a coarse meal
  - fruits and branch tips were used to make a drink
  - some Indian groups used berries and leaves for medicine
  - some groups used the wood for pipes and in construction
- Milkweed** (*Asclepias* sp.) APOCYNACEAE
- to make cordage, but not as strong as that from Indian Hemp
  - cordage used for carrying nets and tumplines
  - some chewed congealed sap as a bitter chewing gum
- Coast Live Oak** (*Quercus agrifolia*) FAGACEAE
- acorns for food
  - acorns for necklaces
  - acorns rubbed into hair to make it grow well
  - acorn paste to prevent sunburn
  - wood for firewood
- Valley Oak** (*Quercus lobata*) FAGACEAE
- acorns for food
  - not considered good for firewood
- Pinyon Pine** (*Pinus monophylla*) PINACEAE
- coastal Chumash traveled inland annually to harvest pinyon seeds
  - bows made from the wood
  - pine pitch used for plank canoe building and other uses
  - pine soot was used for face painting
- Redwood** (*Sequoia sempervirens*) CUPRESSACEAE
- preferred wood for plank canoes (tomols)
  - found in driftwood that floats down the coast from the north
  - used bone wedges and hammer-stones to split planks from the logs
  - paddle blades made of redwood
  - mortuary poles
- Sycamore** (*Platanus racemosa*) PLATANACEAE
- wooden bowls from burls
  - poles for construction
  - bread wrapped in sycamore leaves (Ohlone)

- Soap Plant, Amole** (*Chlorogalum pomeridianum*) AGAVACEAE
- bulb used to make soap
  - crushed bulbs stirred into small f.w. pools stupefied fish which floated; hence collected and eaten
  - fibers surrounding bulb used to make brushes
- Toyon, Christmas Berry, California Holly** (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*) ROSACEAE
- toyon berries were either roasted or left in the sun for a few days and mashed before eating
  - the hard wood was used to make a variety of tools
  - fish hooks, harpoons, fish spears, pestles, bowls, digging sticks, arrow foreshafts etc. were made from toyon wood
  - wood was burned for fuel
  - ceremonial offertory poles decorated with feathers were made from toyon
- Tule, Southern Bulrush** (*Scirpus californicus*) CYPERACEAE
- thatching material for ap
  - to make sleeping mats
  - to make boats for use on calm inland waters
- Southern California Black Walnut** (*Juglans californica*) JUGLANDACEAE
- Chumash ate the tasty nut meats
  - walnut shells were used to make dice with tar from the beaches and abalone shell pieces.
  - bark used in basketry
- Willow** (*Salix* sp.) SALICACEAE
- branches very flexible and used to make frame for Ap
  - to make poles for ramadas
  - to make ladders
  - dugout canoes
  - thatching needles and other tools
  - musical instruments
  - firewood for sweathouses
  - baskets
  - bark strips used to make belts, sandals, skirts
- Yerba Buena** (*Clinopodium douglasii*) LAMIACEAE
- medicinal (for the stomach)
- Yucca** (*Hesperoyucca whipplei*) AGAVACEAE
- Yucca crown was roasted in a pit and eaten
  - fishing lines, (possibly) nets, men's belts made from Yucca string
  - sandals made from fibers
  - dried yucca flower stalks used as tinder to start fires

**Important References:**

Smith, C. 1998. A Flora of the Santa Barbara Region, California. Santa Barbara Botanic Garden and Capra Press.

Timbrook, J. 2007. Chumash Ethnobotany: Plant Knowledge Among the Chumash People of Southern California. Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History and Heyday Books.

Baldwin et al., 2012. The Jepson Manual. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. University California Press.

2/9/10; Amended 3/10/14