

Lithocarpus densiflorus

[Synonyms : *Lithocarpus densiflorus* var. *montanus*, *Pasania densiflora*, *Quercus densiflora*, *Quercus densiflorus* var. *montana*]

TANOAK is an evergreen shrub or tree. Native to south-western North America it has oak-like green leaves and very hard-shelled, acorn-like brown fruit.

It is also known as California chestnut oak, Chestnut oak, Live oak, Peach oak, and Tanbark oak.

Densiflorus is made up of Latin *densi-* (dense) and *-flora* (flowered) components.

Many North American Indian tribes included the acorns in their diet including the Mendocino Indian and Costanoan tribes – and for the Californian Tolowa, the Hupa, Shasta, Yurok, Poliklah and Karok Indians they were a staple food. The tribes had various methods of processing the seeds to rid them of the tannins and these usually involved leaving them for months buried in swampy ground or suspended in flowing stream. The Karok Indians and some of the Pomo tribe stored the acorns for Winter use but the former stored them ground as flour while the latter just dried them. The acorns were prepared for food in many ways for instance the Hupa Indians roasted them or made them into biscuits. Several tribes such as the Poliklah, Pomo, Hahwunkwut, Yurok, Shasta and Hupa used their flour for making bread. The Hupa, Karok, Shasta, Poliklah, Uki, Hahwunkwut and Pomo all made them into a kind of porridge, and the Yuki, Yurok, Karok, Shasta and Pomo Indians also used them to make soup or gruel.

The bark was the source of a dye for Costanoan Indians, and the Tolowa tribe also used it for making their fishing nets and baskets.

Some of the Pomo tribe used the bark and acorns in ceremonial ritual – and they were also expert at spinning strung acorns to produce musical sounds.

Tanoak was a source of medicine for several North American Indian tribes. Some of the Pomo Indians took its acorns (like sweets) for coughs, while the Costanoans applied a bark infusion to facial sores and aching teeth.

Authorities have noted that in North America woodpeckers collect tanoak acorns.

In the past the bark provided an important source of tannin for tanning leather. It has been applied as a preservative to rope that is destined for use in water and has also provided a brown dye.

Although the brown wood tends to split and warp it has been used for pit props, flooring, furniture, baseball bats, fuel and pulp. Authorities note that today the emphasis is predominantly on the fuel.