

Quercus kelloggii

[Synonyms : *Quercus californica*, *Quercus sonomensis*, *Quercus tinctoria* var. *californica*]

CALIFORNIA BLACK OAK is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to western United States, it has glossy dark yellowish-green leaves and edible, brown acorns.

It is also known as Black jack oak, Black oak, Californian black oak, California red oak, *Californische zwarte eik* (Dutch), *Chêne de Kellogg* (French), *Chêne noir de Californie* (French), Interior live oak, Kellogg black oak, Kellogg oak, *Kellogg tölgy* (Hungarian), Maple-leafed oak, Mountain black oak, and Sierra live oak.

The flowers are pollinated by the wind.

This is one of the species that is particularly vulnerable to the very contagious disease known as ‘sudden oak death’.

Kelloggii commemorates the American physician and pioneer Californian botanist (with a particular interest in trees), Dr. Albert Kellogg (1813-1887) who was also one of the 1853 founders of the California Academy of Sciences.

This oak seems to have provided quite a few North American Indian tribes with food. [Any bitter taste, which is a sign of the presence of tannin, was removed by burying them (usually in boggy ground) or carefully washing them in running water (by placing them in a stream in a bag several weeks).] For the Luiseño, Modesse, Shasta, some of the Paiute and the Kawaiisu tribes California black oak acorns formed a staple part of their diet. They were also eaten by the Mewuk, Pomo, Yurok, Karok (who buried them for a year to let them mature), Tolowa, Yokut, Neeshenam and Tubatulabal tribes as well. Cahuilla Indians served them alone as a delicacy on social and ceremonial occasions, and they and the Kawaiisu, Pomo, Shasta, Yuki, Mewuk, Miwok and Mendocino Indian tribes all ground the acorns for flour with which they made bread. Acorns were used by the Diegueño, Shasta, Yuki, Pomo, Mewuk, Cahuilla, Paiute, Luiseño and Miwok Indians for making a kind of porridge. Pomo, Shasta, Mendocino Indian and Miwok tribes all made soup from the acorns, and they were harvested and stored for future and/or Winter use (often in granaries for more than one year) by the Kawaiisu, Luiseño, Paiute, Cahuilla, Miwok and some of the Pomo Indian tribes.

Kawaiisu Indians used the wood for construction, and the Cahuilla tribe collected dried wood for fuel. (Unlike the Cahuilla, Pomo Indians seem to have preferred to burn the bark.)

The shoots provided Maidu and Mewuk tribes with material for basketry – and the latter also used them to make cooking tools.

As with other close oak relatives the Cahuilla tribe have found the acorns to be incredibly versatile. Apart from supplying food they were strung on a cord which was swung against the teeth to make ‘music’ – and the Cahuilla also wore acorn necklaces. Their children played with the acorns and used them for juggling or as jacks (Kawaiisu children used the acorn cups to make tops) and their hunters set the acorns as bait for catching small animals. It is hardly surprising that the Cahuilla viewed the tree (or rather its acorns) as a cash crop that could be bartered for food, as well as for special services from their shaman.

Some of the Pomo tribe used the galls to make a black hair dye.

Today authorities note that the acorns (which need to be processed before consumption) have a high edible oil content which offers a potential significant source of human food.

In the past the wood has been used for shipbuilding. However today the attractively grained wood is used for making furniture, for flooring and also for pallets and fence posts. The wood is also prized as a fuel.

The tree is cultivated as a much admired ornamental and shade tree. Environmentalists have also planted it in areas where the soil needs to be stabilised. (During the 2nd World War its rootstock was used for grafting cork oak, *Quercus suber*, in order to obtain a cork harvest when there was a shortage of the material.)

California black oak was introduced to England in 1878.

Apart from livestock which take advantage of the trees' cover and shade, as well as finding it a palatable source of food, this tree offers a habitat for wildlife, particularly black bears, squirrels, woodpeckers and owls. Deer browse on the foliage and, together with bears, wild pigs, squirrels and other rodents, and birds such as jays, woodpeckers, pigeons and quails, enjoy eating the acorns. (Apparently woodpeckers go to the trouble of drilling holes in the bark and store their acorns in them. As squirrels have not as yet found a way of extracting these they are safe for the woodpecker's later enjoyment.) The tree also attracts butterflies, especially the California sister butterfly (*Adelpha bredowii*) with which it has a symbiotic relationship.