

# BLACK OAK WOODLANDS

## BREAD BASKET OF THE PEOPLE



Black oak (*Quercus kelloggii*) is a tree revered by the native people of northern California. The flavorful, oil-rich acorns of this oak are preferred over other oak species as food because of their superior taste and the pudding-like texture of the cooked meal. Acorn meal was made into mush, soup, and bread. Preparation was a time consuming process: first acorn shells and bitter red skins were removed, then the acorns were pounded into flour, the flour was leached of bitter tannins by repeated applications of water, and finally the meal was cooked in baskets with hot stones. The tradition of preparing acorn bread is still practiced today, although modern appliances may help with pounding, sifting, leaching, and cooking.

### NATIVE AMERICANS AND FIRE

Native Americans burned stands of black oak frequently, to keep them free of conifer trees, to improve acorn crops, reduce insect infestations, to maintain openings for hunting, and to promote sprouting of other fire-adapted species used for food, cordage, medicine and basketry. Black oak is not tolerant of shading, but happily re-establishes after fire by aggressive basal sprouting and by germination of acorns cached by rodents. Black oaks were also sometimes pruned and thinned to enhance acorn production.

Pure stands of black oak are less common today than under historic native burning practices. Fire suppression in the past century has allowed conifer seedlings that would have been killed by fire to survive among the oaks, bringing increased shade and competition for water and nutrients.

### HOW NATIVE AMERICANS USED THE PLANTS OF THE BLACK OAK WOODLANDS

Other plants in the black oak woodland were important in the daily lives of Native Americans. Can you find these plants in our display garden?

- Food: elderberry, gooseberry, currant, chokecherry, hazelnut, blackcap raspberry, Shasta lily, serviceberry, mountain strawberry, Klamath plum, coyote mint and scarlet gilia
- Arrow Shafts: mock orange, hazelnut and rose
- Cordage: milkweed, hazelnut and dogbane
- Medicine: yarrow, Oregon-grape, prince's pine, lupine, mugwort-goldenbush, everlasting, goldenrod and sulfur buckwheat
- Basketry: redbud
- Dye: Oregon grape
- Musical Instruments: elderberry

