

# PLANTS & TREES

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Words followed by an asterisk (\*) are defined in the glossary section.

Note: Some plants discussed in this booklet are not native to Griffith Park.

# INTRODUCTION

**Note: This revised booklet can now be used as a self-guided nature trail reference book on the Fern Canyon Nature Trail in Griffith Park. A map of the trail with post locations is located on page 5.**

The story of plant life is significant, because without plants, people and animals could not exist. Plants not only provide us with oxygen, they can supply almost all of our nutritional and shelter needs. Native Indians and pioneers of the West learned how to use plant life to their advantage. A few techniques of plant preparation for domestic uses are shared with you in this booklet. This booklet can also serve as a guide for identifying various plants within Griffith Park. Each plant is accompanied with a description and photograph.

Plants can be divided into four groups: trees, shrubs, vines, and herbs. Trees and shrubs are woody plants, which means they contain wood or wood fibers. Trees normally have one main stem (trunk) and grow over 20 feet tall. Shrubs are less than 20 feet tall and branch out at the base. Vines are plants that "climb" or gain support by attaching themselves to other objects. Herbs are non-woody plants, such as common grasses.

The principle vegetation in Griffith Park is called chaparral: a collection of native plants associated with hot, dry climates and poor soil conditions. The plants are well adapted for this type of environment, often having small, waxy coated leaves to aid in water retention and light bark to reflect the sun's rays. Fires are common in hot, dry climates and although they seem so destructive, fires are also beneficial. They consume old growth, which makes way for the young seedlings to grow. Many of the plants have seeds that will not open until a fire has burned through the old growth.

The material in this booklet is for educational purposes only. It is against the law to remove any plant or portion of plants from the park.

I would like to express my appreciation to Teresa Prosciewicz, Forestry Division with the Recreation and Parks Department, and Tim Lowery and Mary Brooks of Earthskills for editing my original material and to Ron Campise for his photography. My appreciation is also extended to Mala Gavin for the design of the cover of this booklet. Thanks to the printing department and students at Pasadena City College, and a special thanks to David Murray who redesigned the format and Douglas Haines, Coordinator of Printing Services at Pasadena City College, for printing the cover of this booklet.

Enjoy your visit to the park.

Anne Waisgerber, L. A. City Park Ranger

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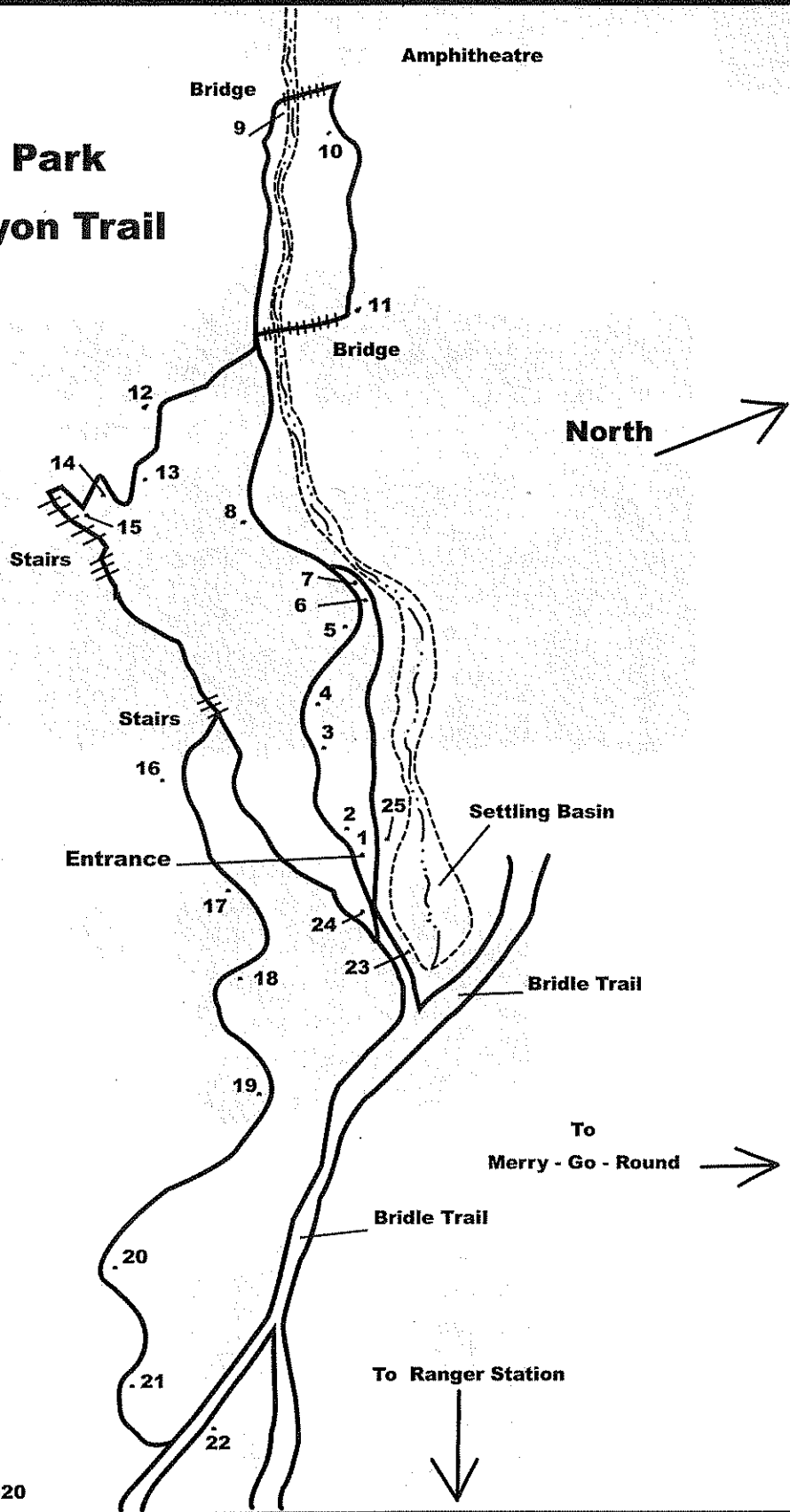
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# Griffith Park Fern Canyon Trail



Not to Scale

Park Ranger Scott #1520

# California Live Oak



*Quercus agrifolia*

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- TYPE:** Native tree.
- HEIGHT:** Grows 60 to 90 feet tall.
- GIRTH:** Grows 2 to 3 feet wide.
- LEAVES:** Evergreen; simple; aromatic; the blades are oblong or ovate\* to elliptical; 2 to 4 inches long. They are thick and leathery, the margins often pinkish.
- FRUIT:** Acorns are chestnut brown, conical\*  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches long, with a bowl-like cup, having thin, hairy scales covering the lower third.
- GENERAL:** The tree has a short trunk and large branches forming a broad, rounded, wide-spreading crown. It never loses all of its leaves at once.
- FACTS:** The leaves and acorns contain tannic acid.\* Native peoples developed a method by which they leached out all of the bitterness from the acorns, so that they could cook the ground meal into a sweet, nourishing mush; this was their principal food.

# Sugar Bush





*Rhus ovata*

---

**TYPE:** Native shrub.

**HEIGHT:** Grows 2½ to 10 feet tall.

**LEAVES:** Simple; ovate\* or elliptical, 1½ to 3 inches long; thick; commonly trough-like, folded inward along the mid-rib (like a taco).

**FLOWERS:** During late Winter and early Spring, clusters of pink flowerbuds blossom.

**FRUIT:** Clusters, gray to reddish, velvety in appearance.

**BARK:** Young bark is smooth; brown or reddish. The bark becomes rough as it ages.


**FACTS:** The shrub's ripe berries are coated with a sour-sweet, sticky substance which native peoples and early pioneers enjoyed by stirring into water and making a cool drink.

# Blue Elderberry

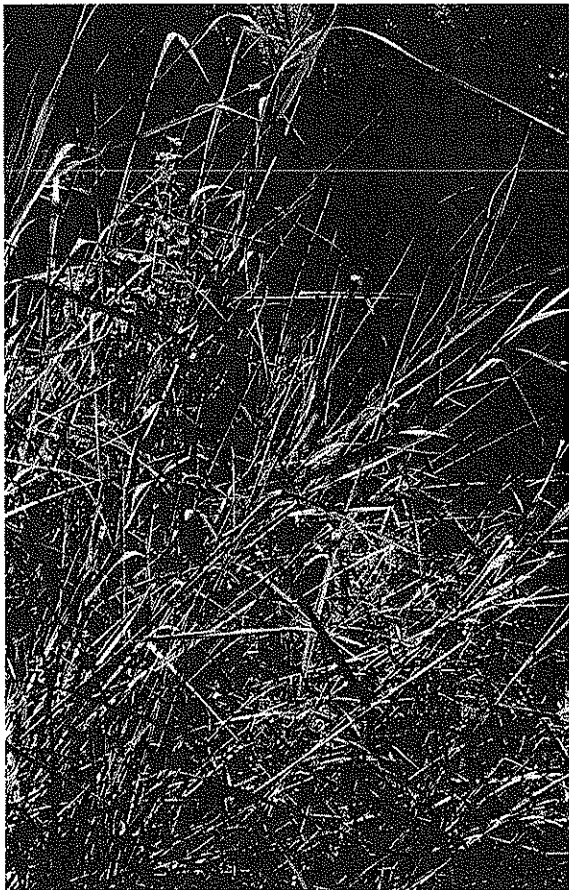


*Sambucus mexicana (caerulea)*

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<b>TYPE:</b>	Native shrub.	
<b>HEIGHT:</b>	Grows 6 to 15 feet tall.	
<b>LEAVES:</b>	Compound with 5 to 9 leaflets.	
<b>FLOWERS:</b>	Small yellow-white flowers in terminal* clusters. Blooms April to August.	
<b>FRUIT:</b>	Dark blue berry, thick, juicy, sweet pulp, ¼."	
<b>BARK:</b>	Gray or brown and furrowed.	
<b>GENERAL:</b>	The stems are POISONOUS.	
<b>FACTS:</b>	Native peoples named this shrub the 'Tree of Music,' because they were able to make flutes from branches that were cut in the Spring and dried with the leaves still on. When thoroughly dry, they would bore holes in the branches with a hot stick. The large shoots were used for arrow shafts. Berries were used for a drink and also dried and stored for winter use. Flowers were used fresh, externally in a decoction* for an antiseptic wash for skin disease. It was also taken internally to check bleeding of the lungs. The inner bark yields a strong emetic.* Fine wine can be made from the berries. When the berries are ripe, they are gathered and dried in the sun, then stored away to make winter pies. Small flowers can be beaten in a batter for pancakes or muffins.	

# Giant Rye Grass





*Leymus condensatus (Elymus condensatus)*

---

**TYPE:** Native herb.

**HEIGHT:** Grows 5 to 6 feet tall.

**GENERAL:** The blades wrap around the main stalk. The fruit blooms at the top of the stalk. The plant holds back soil erosion and is dormant\* in the Fall and Winter. It is green and fruits in the late Spring and early Summer.

**FACTS:** Giant Rye Grass was used by the native peoples along with yucca fibers and reeds to build shelters. The grass was also used as thatch or roof covering. Seeds were eaten when other foods were scarce. Stems were used to make arrows. This plant is commonly found along streams and ditch banks.

# Poison Oak



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*Rhus diversiloba* (*Toxicodendron diversilobum*)

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- TYPE:** Native shrub or vine.
- HEIGHT:** Grows 2 to 8 feet tall.
- LEAVES:** Deciduous,\* alternate; usually three-segments. Leaflets are 1-4 inches long.
- FLOWERS:** March to April.
- FRUIT:** Berry-like whitish or brown; stony seed 1/4 inch in diameter.
- FACTS:** Poison Oak (unrelated to Eastern Poison Ivy), is the most wide-spread shrub or vine in California; it grows upwards or can spread horizontally. In Fall, its reddish leaves color many hills and roadsides. The juice of the plant is readily vaporized and frequently causes an irritating rash to develop in many people. Irritation from the oily leaves can develop from touching the leaves directly, from touching clothing or fur that has touched the leaves, or from being exposed to the plant's smoke from burning the leaves. Scratching quickly spreads the rash. Washing thoroughly with soap or applying special skin preparations reduces the irritation. To help children remember to avoid Poison Oak, there is a rhyme you can teach them, "leaves of three, let them be." The shrub is good for erosion control in the park hills.



# Black Mustard Plant





*Brassica nigra*

---

**TYPE:** A non-native herb that can displace desirable native species.

**HEIGHT:** Grows 2 to 6 feet tall.

**LEAVES:** Large, smooth; pinnately\*-lobed, with ear-like lobes at their base, each clasping the stem.

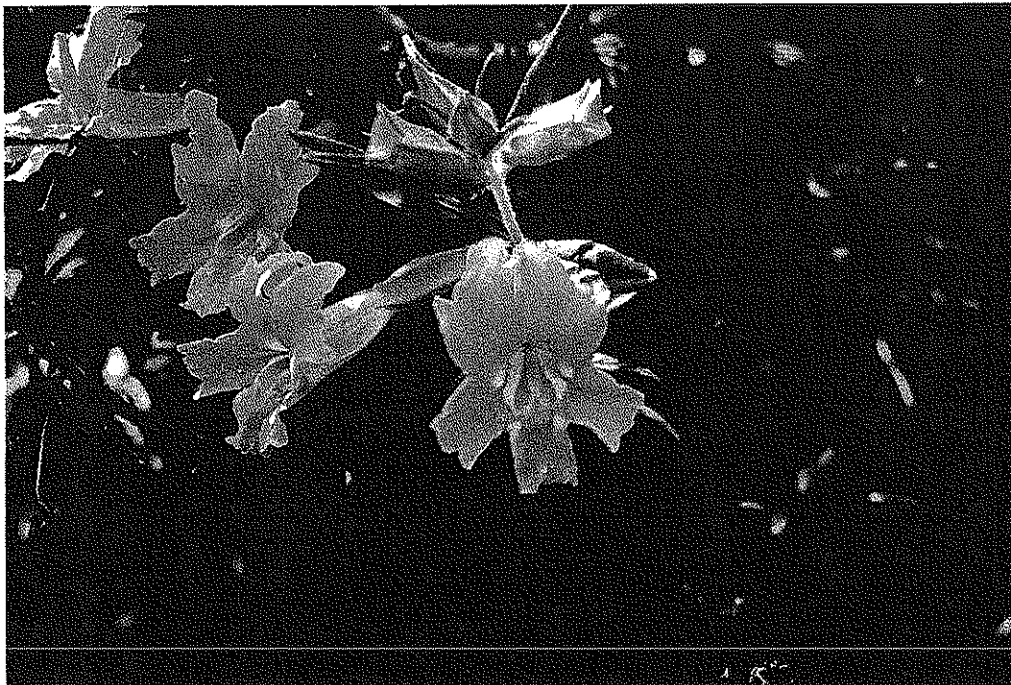
**FLOWERS:** Small cruciferous,\* yellow, in long racemes.\* Blooms from February to July.

**SEEDS:** Reddish brown and oval.

**PODS:**  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch long.

**FACTS:** The young greens are edible and can be boiled like spinach. The native peoples sometimes mixed the seeds with cornmeal.

# Sticky Monkey



*Mimulus aurantiacus*

---

**TYPE:** Native herb.

**HEIGHT:** Grows 1 to 2 feet tall.

**LEAVES:** Opposite; sticky.

**FLOWERS:** Tuliped; yellow, purple, red, or violet; throat open and closed by a palate.\*  
Blooms March to August.

**FACTS:** Native peoples used both young stems and leaves for salad greens. The root of the plant was used as an astringent.\* Raw leaves and stems were crushed and applied to rope burns and wounds as a poultice.\* Ashes from the leaves were used for salt.

# White Snake Root





*Ageratina adenophora (Eupatorium)*

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- TYPE:** Native herb.
- HEIGHT:** Grows 12 to 35 feet tall.
- LEAVES:** Almost always green if they have enough water. Mostly opposite, deltoid, (triangular-shaped)\* oval, toothed, and  $\frac{3}{4}$  to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches long.
- FLOWERS:** As they mature, they turn from pink to a purplish color or white.
- STEMS:** Purple-green in color and erect. Simple branch stems.
- GENERAL:** Numerous flower heads are in compact clusters, the heads being  $\frac{3}{16}$  inches high.
- FACTS:** Because the roots of this plant have detergent properties, the native peoples crushed the roots and put them in ponds to stupefy\* the fish.

# California Walnut (Black Walnut)



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*Juglans californica*

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**TYPE:** Native tree

**HEIGHT:** Grows 15 to 30 feet tall.

**GIRTH:** Grows 1 to 2 feet wide.

**LEAVES:** 6 to 9 inches long, with 11 to 15 leaflets.

**FRUIT:** Small and round  $\frac{1}{3}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches in diameter. The fruit has dark-colored, finely-haired husks and nuts with length-wise grooved shells.

**FACTS:** These trees like moist soil along streams and fertile bottom-lands. They appear ragged with age.

**POINT OF INTEREST:** The pungent\* tasting nuts are mostly used for cooking.

# Laurel Sumac



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*Rhus malosma (Rhus laurina)*

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**TYPE:** Native shrub.

**HEIGHT:** Grows 6 to 12 feet tall.

**LEAVES:** Evergreen; simple, aromatic; the blades are oblong or ovate to elliptical; 2 to 4 inches long. They are thick and leathery, the margins often are pinkish.

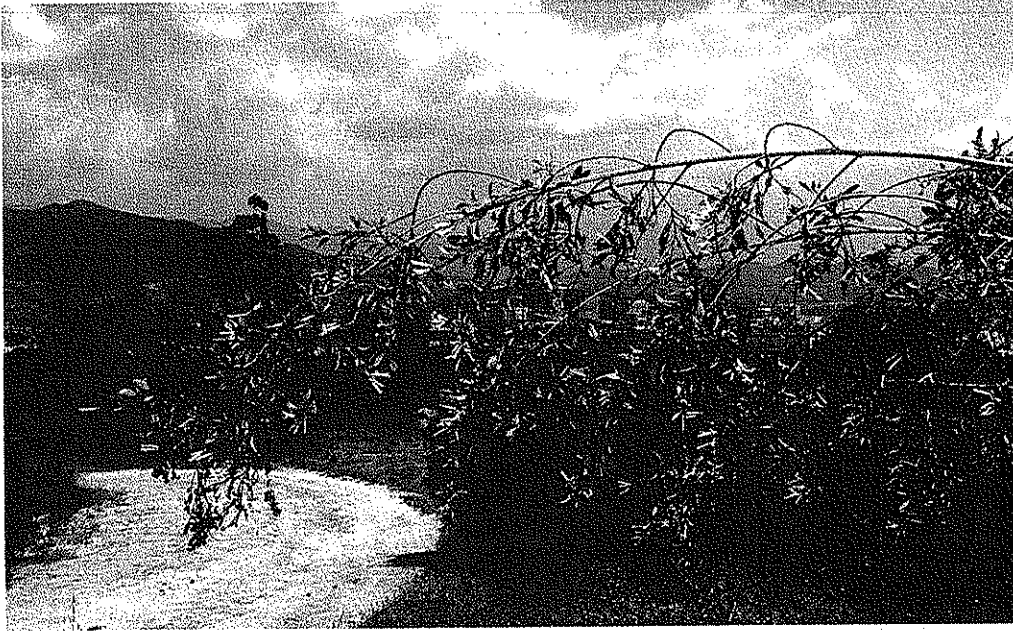
**FRUIT:** Whitish in color, with a seed enclosed in a pit.

**FLOWERS:** White, very small and numerous. Flowering period is from June to July.

**BARK:** Smooth, brown or reddish in color.

**FACTS:** The plant gives off an odor similar to bitter almonds. The seeds yield a pungent\* oil. Bees like the pollen from the flowers.

# Indian Tree Tobacco





*Nicotiana glauca*

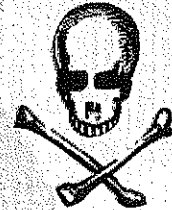
**TYPE:** Non-native shrub

**HEIGHT:** Grows 6 to 18 feet tall.

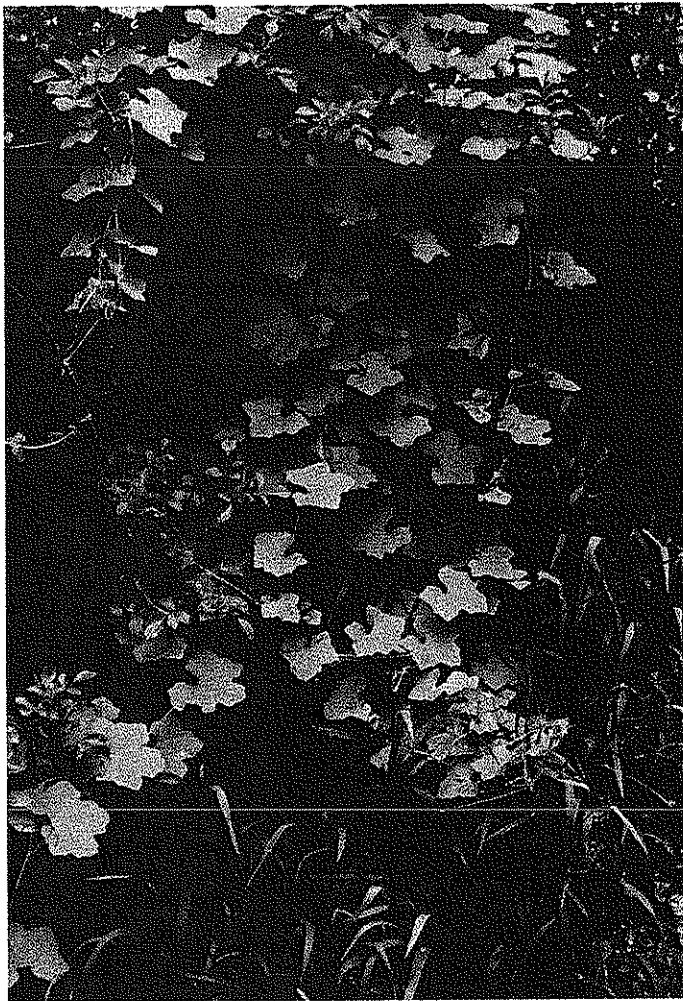
**LEAVES:** Evergreen; soft, rubbery; dull green

**FLOWERS:** Yellow, tubular,\* dilated near the throat.  
Blooms April to September.

**FACTS:** This plant is **POISONOUS** if eaten by humans or animals. It is native to South America and is now widely spread over North America.



# Wild Cucumber

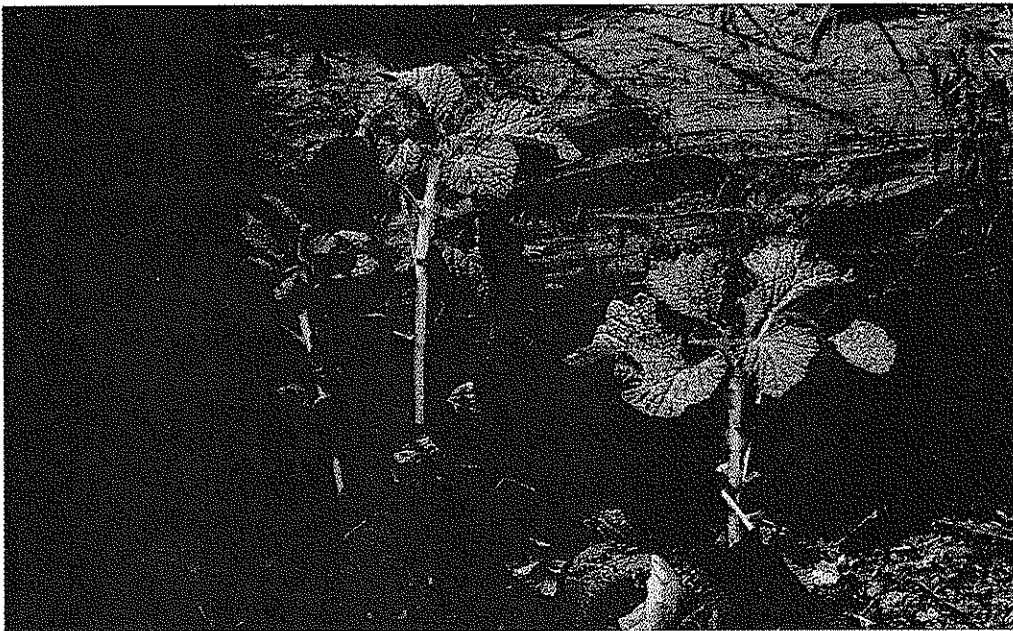


*Marah macrocarpus*

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- TYPE:** Native vine (also called Manroot).
- HEIGHT:** Varies.
- LEAVES:** Thin, ivy-like.
- FLOWERS:** Small, greenish-white in color. Blooms January to April.
- FRUIT:** Large, green prickly seed pods.
- GENERAL:** The plant is a climbing vine. When pods are ripe, they pop open and scatter large brown seeds that are covered with a soapy pulp.
- FACTS:** Native peoples utilized this plant in many ways. The seeds were roasted then consumed to relieve kidney trouble. Oil was extracted from the seeds and used to prevent loss of hair. Crushed roots were mixed with sugar and applied on horses to relieve saddle-sores. Crushed green roots or tubers\*, which are very bitter were dispersed into ponds to stupefy\* fish. This tactic, however, is now illegal.

# Horehound



*Marrubium vulgare*

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**TYPE:** Non-native herb.  
Invasive

**HEIGHT:** Grows 6 to 30 inches tall.

**LEAVES:** Hairy, wrinkly, one inch long.

**FLOWERS:** In whorls;\* and green.

**STEMS:** Erect; white stems.

**FACTS:** A preparation from the leaves was used as medicine for colds. The leaves were also steeped for tea. An extract is still used today in Horehound candy. This plant was originally introduced from Europe.

# California Holly





*Heteromeles arbutifolia*

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**TYPE:** Native shrub.

**HEIGHT:** Grows 6 to 10 feet tall.

**LEAVES:** Simple; serrated.\*

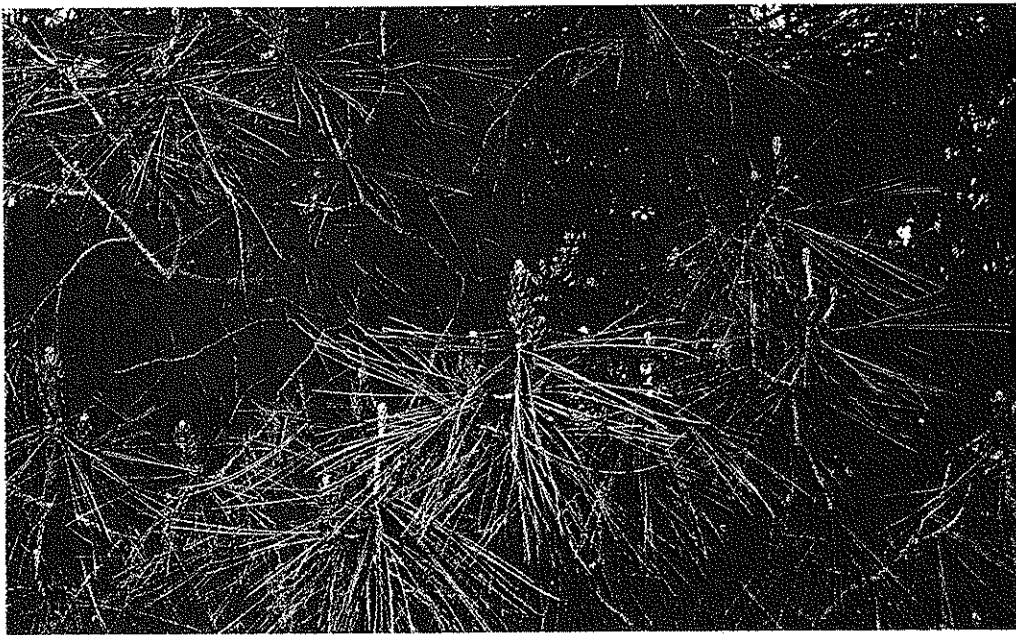
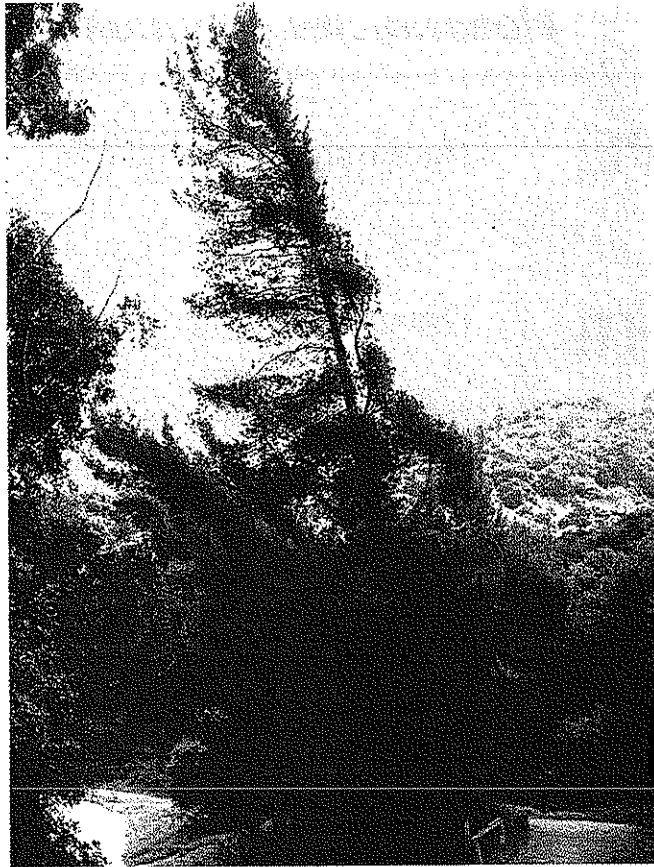
**FLOWERS:** Small terminal\* clusters; white. Blooms June to July.

**FRUIT:** A red, berry-like pome

**GENERAL:** Grows in the foothills in altitudes below 4,000 ft.

**FACTS:** Early Californians made a drink from the berries. Fishermen in the Channel Islands used the bark to tan their fish nets. Native peoples boiled the berries and baked them in ground ovens for 2-3 days using hot stones. They also stored the berries for a few months, then parched\* them and ground them into a meal.

# Aleppo Pine Tree



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*Pinus halepensis*

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**TYPE:** Non-native tree.

**HEIGHT:** Grows 30-60 feet tall.

**LEAVES:** Needles are light green, less than 4" long and are in bundles of two needles each.

**YOUNG TREES:** Sparsely foliated. Slow growing; 8 feet in ten years.

**MATURE TREES:** Open, round-topped head, with short branches.

**FACTS:** Native peoples used the sap to relieve sore throats. The sap was also used to make candles. The tree is not native to Griffith Park.

# Miner's Lettuce



*Claytonia perfoliata*

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**TYPE:** Native herb

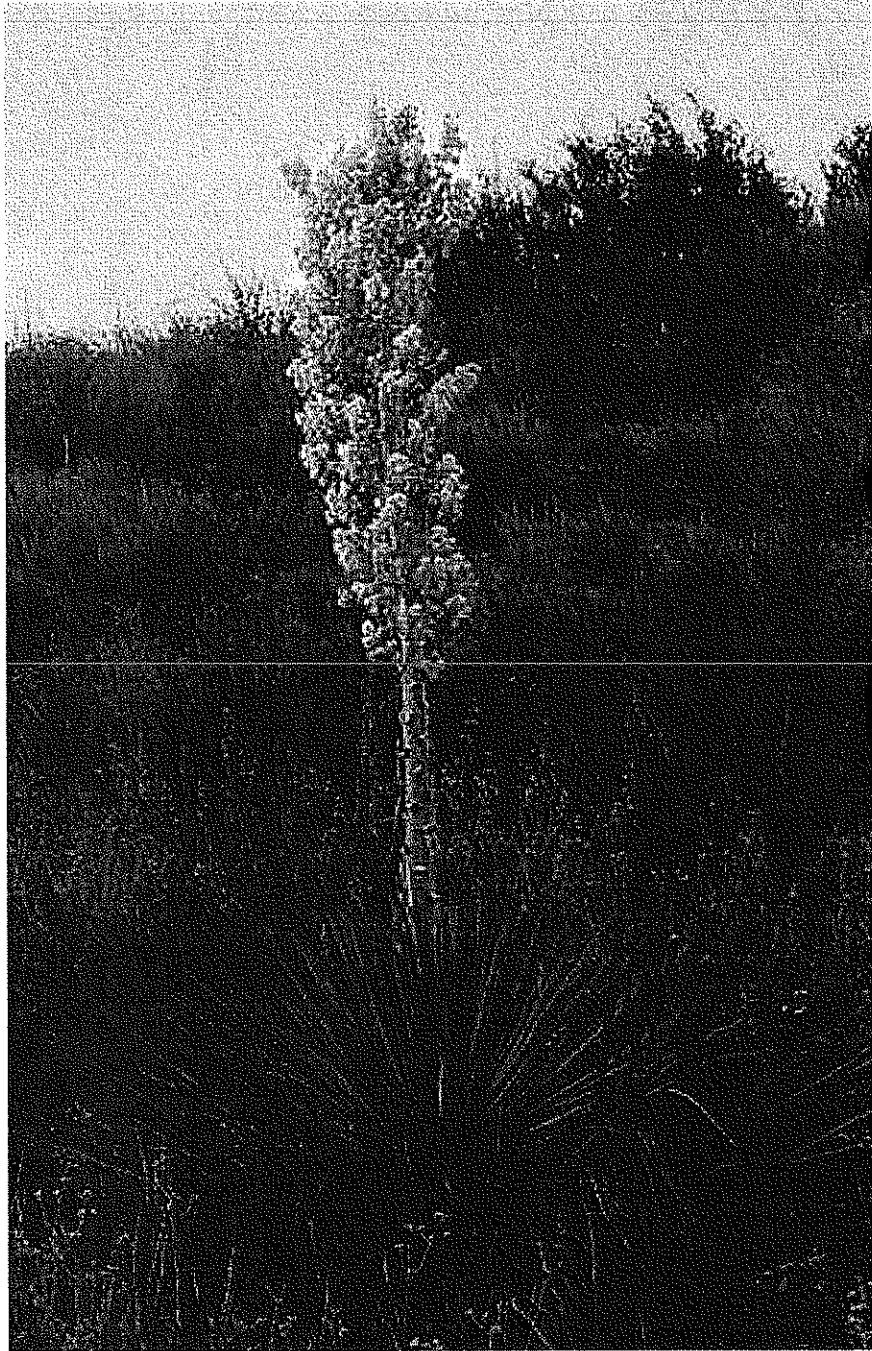
**HEIGHT:** Grows 5 to 12 inches tall.

**LEAVES:** Two types of leaves; the basal leaves have long leaf stems and the upper leaves form into shallow cups around the stems.

**FLOWERS:** Small and vary from white to pink.  
Blooms February to April.

**FACTS:** This edible plant is found in shaded, moist areas of Griffith Park in early Spring.

# Our Lord's Candle





*Yucca Whipplei*

---

**TYPE:** Native succulent.

**HEIGHT:** Grows up to 12 feet tall.

**LEAVES:** Grow to 3 feet long; spinytipped, gray-green; grows in dense clusters at the base of the stalk.

**FLOWERS:** Massive clusters in a large spike at the top of the stalk, creamy white to yellow, often purple-tinged. Blooms after 5 to 7 years, April to June.

**FACTS:** The plant is protected by California State Law. The native peoples soaked the leaves in water for a day and pounded them into fibers to be used like thread or woven into rope. The root was crushed and mixed with water to make shampoo. The plant produces a long stalk with hundreds of flowers during the last year of its life. The plant has a symbiotic relationship with the Yucca Moth, which pollinates the Yucca's flowers and lays eggs in the flowers. The hatching larvae eat a small portion of the Yucca's developing seeds.

# Black Night Shade



*Solanum douglasii*

**TYPE:** Native herb.

**HEIGHT:** Grows 1-2 feet tall.

**FLOWERS:** White to lavender.

**FRUIT:** Berries are shiny green to black (ripe).

**GENERAL:** Straggling stems.

**FACTS:** The berries are POISONOUS, however, boiling them will destroy the toxic\* properties in the ripe, black colored berries and they are often made into pies. Although the old leaves are poisonous, it is said that the young leaves and stems can be boiled as a pot herb. Native peoples used a decoction\* as an eye wash.



# White Sage



*Salvia apiana*

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**TYPE:** Native herb.

**HEIGHT:** Grows 3 to 10 inches tall.

**BRANCH:** Narrow, straight, and slender.

**LEAVES:** Very white.

**FLOWERS:** In a close panicle (pyramid shaped, loosley-branched flower cluster). Blooms April to July.

**FACTS:** This plant was used for cooking purposes. The leaves were dried and crushed for seasoning. Dry seeds were gathered and ground into meal. The tender tops were eaten raw or roasted. A tea was made from the root.

# Eucalyptus (Desert Gum)





*Eucalyptus rudis*

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**TYPE:** Non-native tree.

**HEIGHT:** Grows up to 80 feet tall.

**GIRTH:** Up to 20 inches wide.

**LEAVES:** Copper color when young. Becomes green-blue and brittle, 6 to 8 inches long.

**FACTS:** The trees were brought to America from Australia in the late 1800's. The wood from the tree was used to make railroad ties. It was later discovered that as the wood dried out, it split, thus making it undesirable as railroad tie material. The wood did burn well and was used to power steam engines. The tree is heat and cold tolerant, but not very drought resistant. It is the most important genus\* of the Myrtle family, with more than 500 species native to Australia.

# Wild Buckwheat



*Eriogonum fasciculatum*

---

**TYPE:** Native herb.

**HEIGHT:** Grows 1 to 2 feet tall.

**LEAVES:** Grow  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches; dark, shiny green.

**FLOWERS:** White to pinkish, later drying to a rust brown. Forms in clusters or heads.

**FACTS:** Buckwheat is an excellent plant for beekeepers, because of its long blooming season and fine quality honey; it is poor stock feed. Native peoples made a decoction\* from the leaves for headaches and stomach pain. Flowers stemming from the Buckwheat can be steeped into a tea to relieve bronchial ailments, high blood pressure and can also be used as an eye-wash. The stems and leaves were made into tea to treat bladder trouble.

# Sweet Fennel



*Foeniculum vulgare*

---

**TYPE:** Non-native herb.  
Invasive

**HEIGHT:** Grows 2 to 7 feet tall.

**LEAVES:** Finely divided; light grayish green; sweet-black licorice aroma.

**FLOWERS:** Tiny yellow flowers in compound\* flat umbels\* on long stems.

**FACTS:** The Mission Fathers sprinkled the floors with water mixed with crushed leaves to make the floors smell sweet. Native peoples used the seeds for digestive trouble and gathered young shoots to use as a pot herb. Tea from the roots was used for colds and the leaves were chewed for a laxative effect.

# Beaver Tail Cactus





*Opuntia basilaris*

---

**TYPE:** Native succulent.

**HEIGHT:** Grows 8 to 20 inches tall.

**LEAVES:** Round, also called joints. 3-10 inches long, with very short reddish spines.

**FLOWERS:** Growing on upper margins of joints; 4-6 inches wide; deep rose in color, with a velvety sheen. Blooms March to June.

**GENERAL:** Cactus are low erect plants, usually found in clumps.

**FACTS:** Remove the spines of young, tender leaves. Peel leaves, cut up and cook. The raw fruit is also edible.

# Scrub Oak



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*Quercus Berberidifolia*

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**TYPE:** Native shrub.

**HEIGHT:** Grows 2 to 8 feet tall.

**LEAVES:** Evergreen,  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inches long; margins are spiny-tipped.

**FRUIT:** Acorns are  $\frac{3}{4}$  to  $1\frac{1}{8}$  inches long.

**BARK:** Scaly, light gray-brown.

**GENERAL:** This shrub is very dense, with rigid, short-branches. It is found in low mountain areas. It usually stump-sprouts after a fire.

**FACTS:** The native peoples used the acorns for food after they leached out the tannic acid by a process using water.

# Arroyo Willow

Arroyo Willow with gall



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*Salix lasiolepis*

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**TYPE:** Native small tree, large shrub.

**HEIGHT:** Grows 10 to 18 feet tall.

**LEAVES:** 3-6 inches long and ½ to 1 inch wide. Dark green front and somewhat hairy gray underneath.

**BARK:** Gray-brown on young trees, black on mature trees.

**GENERAL:** The tree has an irregular crown of ascending, spreading branches.

**FACTS:** Trees may have small red balls or galls on the leaves. These galls are created by the tree as a defensive reaction to insect eggs and larva. Native peoples used the stems for warps\* in basket-making and for frameworks in wickiups.

# Glossary

Aromatic:	Containing aroma; fragrant, spicy.
Astringent:	A binding agent.
Compound:	More than one.
Conical:	In the form of a cone.
Cruciferous:	Any plant in the mustard family.
Deciduous:	Falling off of leaves seasonally or at maturity.
Decoction:	Extract made by boiling or soaking in hot water.
Deltoid:	Triangle shaped.
Dilated:	Enlarged.
Dormant:	Resting, inactive during certain seasons.
Emetic:	Something that causes vomiting.
Foliage:	Collectively, the mass of leaves of a plant.
Genus:	A class divided into several subordinate species.
Herb:	A plant that is valued for its medicinal, savory, or aromatic qualities. It dies down at the end of the season. Seed plant that doesn't develop woody persistent tissue.



# Glossary

Leached:	To dissolve out by a filtering liquid in order to remove a certain substance.
Mid-rib:	The central vein of a leaf.
Non-volatile:	Not readily vaporized.
Ovate:	Shaped like an egg or oval.
Palate:	Obstruction.
Panicle:	Any pyramidal, loosely branched flower cluster.
Parched:	To become dry or scorched, to toast under dry heat.
Pinnately:	Applies to compound leaves having leaflets of primary divisions arranged on each side of a common stem.
Pome:	A fleshy fruit consisting of an outer thickened layer and a central core with seeds.
Poultice:	A soft composition, usually heated and spread on a cloth and applied to a sore.
Pulp:	A moist, slightly cohering mass, consisting of soft, non-dissolved vegetable matter.
Pungent:	Causing a sharp or irritating sensation.
Racemes:	A type of simple development of flowers in which elongated axis bears flowers on short stems in succession toward the tip or point.

# Glossary

Serrated:	Having a saw-toothed edge.
Spindly:	To grow to a stalk or stem rather than a flower or fruit.
Stupefy:	To dull feelings or sensations.
Tannic Acid:	A strongly astringent substance obtained in scales from gallnuts, sumac, etc.
Terminal:	Growing at the end of a branch or stem.
Toxic:	Poisonous.
Tuber:	A short, fleshy, usually underground stem or shoot with small scale leaves, has buds or eyes.
Umbels:	A flat or rounded flower cluster.
Warp:	Pertains to weaving lengthwise threads such as in baskets.
Whorls:	A circle of similar parts such as leaves or flowers.

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(The books listed in this bibliography have been the source for most of the information in this booklet. The remainder are from many other verbal sources and factual to the best of my knowledge. A. W.)

Wildlife that might be seen in Griffith Park includes deer, coyote (pictured below), possum, racon, fox, squirrel, rabbit, skunk, wood rat, a variety of snakes and lizards, and birds such as Red Tail Hawks, Scrub Jays, and Wood Peckers.



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Layout David Murray  
Photographs by Ron Campise

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