PLANT FACT SHEET

Umbellularia californica (Hook. & Arn.) Nutt.

GENUS *Umbellularia* **FAMILY** Lauraceae

COMMON NAMES California laurel, Balm of heaven, Cajeput tree, Californian Bay Tree, Californian olive, California nutmeg, Headache Tree, Mountain laurel, Pepper-nut, Sassafras laurel, Spice bush

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Fruit, Seeds, Leaves - flavouring, Bark - coffee

CAUTION: The crushed leaves give off a poisonous vapour. This can produce headaches.
The leaves are used to flavour soups, stews and meat dishes.
They are sold as a substitute for sweet bay leaf.
The fruit are eaten raw or boiled.
The nuts are parched and eaten or ground into flour for bread.
The bark of the roots is sometimes used as a coffee substitute.

DESCRIPTION

An evergreen tree. It grows 30 m tall. It is a broadly spreading tree. The bark is dark grey and cracks into rectangle shaped plates. The leaves are oblong and 10 cm long by 2.5 cm wide. They do not have teeth. The leaves are bright green or deep yellow-green. The flowers are 1 cm across. They do not have petals but have 6 green sepals. The flowers occur in clusters of up to 10. They are in the axils of leaves. The fruit is a rounded or egg shaped berry. It is 2.5 cm long and green but ripens to deep purple.

HABITAT

It is a warm temperate plant. It is native to S.W. United States. It grows in evergreen forests and in valleys. It suits hardiness zones 8-10.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

It can be grown by seeds or cuttings.

NOTES

There is only one Umbellularia species.

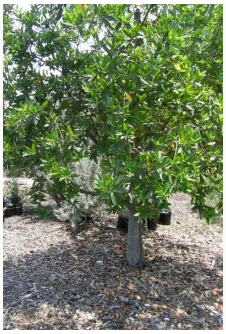
PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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