



Umbellularia californica

Family: Lauraceae

California Laurel

Umbellularia californica is the only species in this genus. Its name is derived from the Latin *umbellula*, a small umbel, describing the flower cluster (inflorescence).

Umbellularia californica-Acacia, Acacia Burl, Balm-of-heaven, Bay, Bay Laurel, Bay Tree, Black Laurel, Black Myrtle, Cajeput, Cajeput-tree, California Bay, California Bay Tree, California Laurel, California Olive, California Sassafras, Californian Olive, Laurel, Mountain Hemlock, Mountain Laurel, Myrtle, Myrtle Tree, Myrtly, Oregon Mirt, Oregon Myrtle, Oreodaphne, Pacific Myrtle, Peppermintwood, Pepperwood, Spice Tree, White Laurel, White Myrtle, Yellow Laurel, Yellow Myrtle

Distribution

Pacific coast region of southwest Oregon, south mostly in Coast Ranges to southern California and in the Sierra Nevada to central California.

The Tree

This tree grows to 80 feet in height and 3 feet in diameter. California Laurel grows at elevations from sea level to over 6,000 feet. It is tolerant of various soil types and conditions, and grows in many habitats from flatlands to mountain slopes, the best conditions being alluvial deposits from streams and rivers. It grows in association with coastal redwood, sequoia, Port Orford cedar and Douglas fir. They are slow growing and have multiple trunks in poorer soils. The leaves are used by spice companies as "bay" leaves. The leaves are evergreen and glossy, while the flowers are small and yellowish green in color. It produces spherical purplish fruits. This species is planted as an ornamental shrub in warmer climates of the south & west. The small twigs are pale green, turning reddish brown over time. The bark is a dark red brown and sometimes an inch thick.

The Wood

General

The sapwood of California Laurel is thick and whitish to light brown, while the heartwood is light brown to grayish brown to an olive color, with dark streaks. The wood has a strong, spicy odor. It darkens when soaked in water.

Mechanical Properties (2-inch standard)

	Specific gravity	MOE GPa	MOR MPa	Compression		WML ^a kJ/m ³	Hardness N	Shear MPa
				Parallel MPa	Perpendicular MPa			
Green	0.51	5.0	45.5	20.8	5.52	116	4,448	8.76
Dry	0.55	6.5	55.2	38.9	9.65	56	5,649	12.82

^aWML = Work to maximum load.
Reference (59).

Drying and Shrinkage

Type of shrinkage	Percentage of shrinkage (green to final moisture content)		
	0% MC	6% MC	20% MC
Tangential	8.1	6.8	2.8
Radial	2.8	2.3	1.0
Volumetric	11.9	9.9	4.1
References: 0% MC (59), 6% and 20% MC (90).			

Kiln Drying Schedules^a

Condition	Stock				
	4/4, 5/4, 6/4	8/4	10/4	12/4	16/4
Standard	T6-A4	T5-A3	-	-	-
^a References (6, 86).					

Working Properties: California Laurel is easily worked and takes a high polish.

Durability: The heartwood is very durable.

Preservation: No information available at this time.

Uses: Veneer (burls for cabinetry), novelties, candle sticks, bowls, plates, woodenware, turnery, furniture squares, cabinetwork, interior trim, used under the keel to launch ships.

Toxicity: Can be an irritant (64 & 105)

Additional Reading and References Cited (in parentheses)

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