

Umbellularia californica - California Laurel

California laurel, Umbellularia californica, is an aromatic, evergreen tree readily identified by the pungent odor of the crushed leaves. It is widely distributed in the Coast Ranges from Oregon to southern California--from sea level to about 4000 feet and is occasionally found in the western Sierra Nevada up to about 5000 feet. It is commonly known under a variety of names such as California laurel, bay tree, bay laurel, spice tree and pepper-wood in California, and in Oregon is called Oregon laurel, myrtle or Oregon myrtle.

It is found naturally in a great variety of situations--frequently growing in large valleys, alluvial flats, sea-bluffs, sharp deep canyons, fertile hill slopes, rocky knolls or sun burnt ridges. The ability of the Bay Tree to adapt itself to such widely varying conditions is remarkable--and these various habitats necessitate its assuming many distinct forms.

What might be called a normal form is an upright tree 40 to 75 feet high and usually taller than broad. In the Redwood belt of northern California there are groves where trees with erect straight trunks 3 to 6 feet in diameter attain a height over 100 feet. Individual trees generally branch rather low with the main limbs growing large and somewhat upright. The most extreme variation in form is probably the prostrate or semi-prostrate plants growing in coastal areas which are subject to continuous rather strong winds. Under these conditions plants will sometimes cover a considerable

We can emphasize that Umbellularia californica is a beautiful evergreen tree which has limited use as an individual specimen. Large trees are not uncommon in the Santa Clara Valley and are easy to locate, especially in the older districts where the original development has not been re-arranged by the current unprecedented march of progress.

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