

Tanoak (*Notholithocarpus densiflorus*)



Summary:

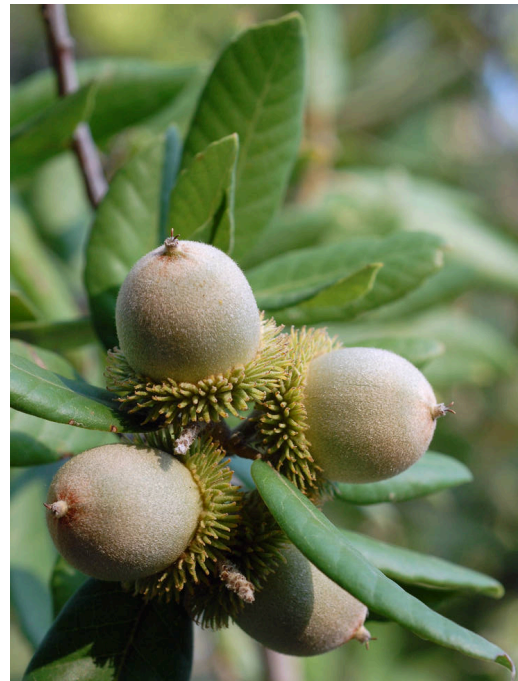
The tanoak is an evergreen tree in the beech family, which includes chestnuts, oaks, and beeches. Despite the name and the fact that they produce acorns, tanoaks are not considered true oak trees. Tanoak is native and endemic to southern Oregon and California (Calscape 2026). Their range extends along the Pacific Coast, beginning near the Umpqua River in Oregon, stretching south almost to Santa Barbara, California. Tanoaks may grow as trees or shrubs, but most commonly grow to a medium-size, typically reaching heights of 65 to 80 feet (Fryer 2017).

Tanoaks play a crucial role in redwood forest ecosystems. The medium-height trees add a secondary canopy to old-growth redwood forests, creating more niches for a diverse range of species. Their acorns are also an important food for bears, deer, rodents, and birds (Save the Redwoods League 2022). As of now, tanoaks are abundant but

threatened in redwood forests, primarily due to the continued prevalence of sudden oak death. Since it arrived in California, it is estimated that sudden oak death has killed more than 38 million tanoak trees (EPIC 2020).

Tanoaks and Fire:

With its flammable leaves and position in the subcanopy, tanoaks have adapted to catch fire easily. Small trees usually burn back to the burl, while larger trees typically survive but sustain burn scars. Tanoak seedlings and saplings are most often top-killed, even from low-severity surface fires. Despite susceptibility to damage, the postfire survivorship of tanoaks is high (Fryer 2017). Nearly all tanoak burls resprout after fire, and it is rare that the resprouts don't survive. Because tanoak is a strong sprouter, frequent fire may promote tanoak dominance over some of their counterparts. So long as tanoaks are healthy and disease-free, they have a high chance of survival following a wildfire event (Fryer 2017).



References:

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