

~ Late winter ~
IN A TINY NEIGHBORHOOD PARK

PALOMA and WINGS
meet
GRANDMOTHER
BAY TREE
(Umbellularia
californica)

by
Jane Valencia



HUGE!
AND QUITE
OLD, I'D SAY

THERE IT IS, WINGS.
ISN'T SHE AN AMAZING
TREE?

MMM! I LOVE THE
SMELL OF THE LEAVES.
LIKE CINNAMON!



GRANDMOTHER,
CAN I
CLIMB
YOU?

-OH, THANK
YOU

I DIDN'T
HEAR
ANYTHING!



I THINK
I CAN...

...GRIP
HERE...



VERY
AROMATIC
INDEED!

LET'S SEE...

BITS OF LEAF
SIMMERED
IN WATER

IN SUMMER
THE SMELL IS
REALLY STRONG.
I GUESS THE SUN RUNS
STRAIGHT INTO THE
LEAVES AND JUST PULLS
THE OILS UP AND OUT!
MY HEAD FEELS LIKE
IT OPENS- IN A GOOD WAY
I BET IF I HAD A
HEADACHE IT WOULD
JUST GO AWAY!

AS A
MATTER
OF FACT,
FOLKS
DID MAKE
A TEA WITH
THE LEAVES
TO HELP GET
RID OF HEADACHES!
YOU EITHER BREATHE
IN THE STEAM OR
DRINK THE TEA,



Oh, THE
STRONG SMELL
OF THE TREE
SOMETIMES
CAUSES
HEADACHES.
THE TEA WILL
GET RID OF THOSE KINDS OF HEADACHES
TOO. HANDY!

CALIFORNIA BAY
A MEMBER of the
LAUREL FAMILY
(LAURACEAE)
ALSO KNOWN AS
CALIF. LAUREL
PEPPERWOOD
HEADACHE
TREE
KNOWN IN
OREGON
AS "OREGON"
MYRTLE"
LIKES MOIST
SOILS, ESPECIALLY
IN MOUNTAIN AND
CANYONS. AND
IN MIXED FORESTS
FOUND ON CALIF. + SW OREGON COASTS



"BUT I THINK GRANDMOTHER BAY HAS A FAR THICKER TRUNK THAN WHAT YOUR SCROLL DESCRIBES, WINGS."

"KINDA GRAYISH-RED AND A LITTLE RUFFLY"

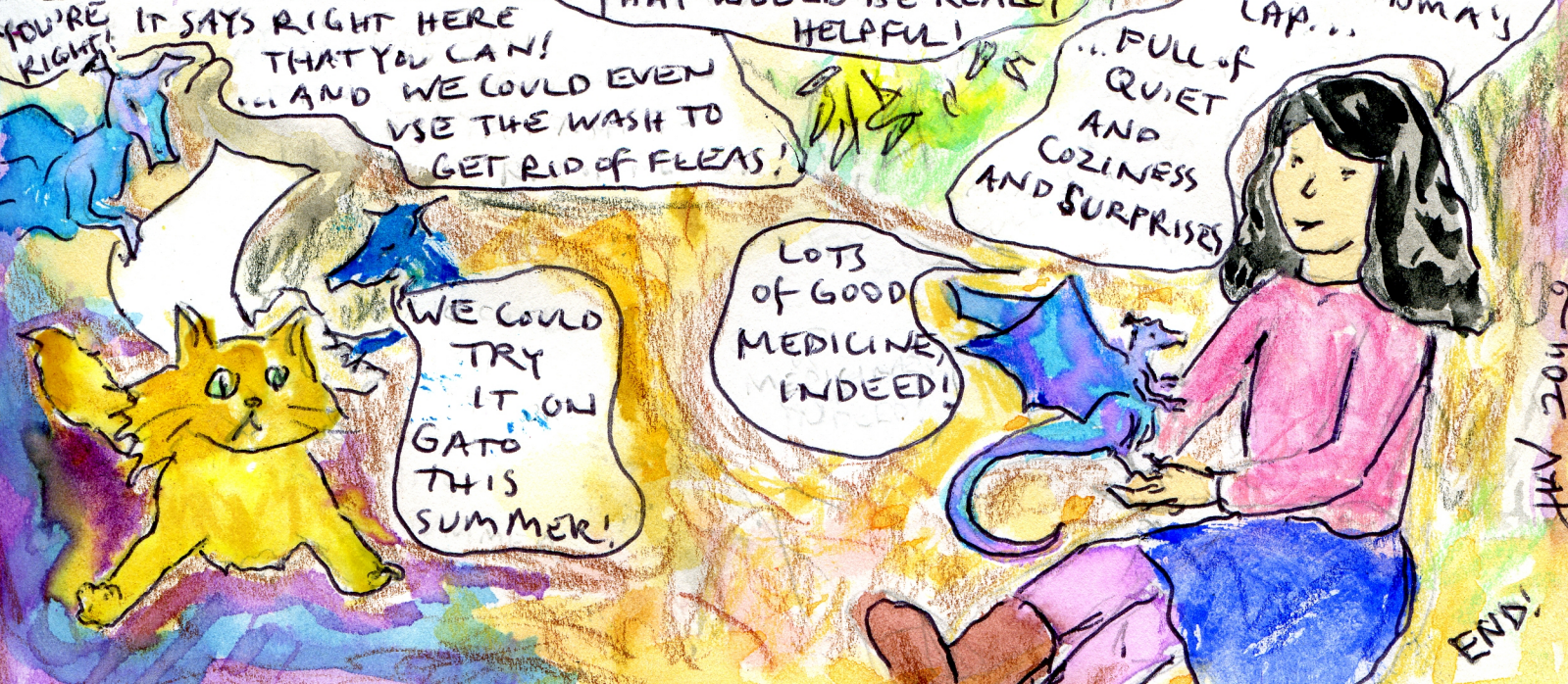
"('SCALED', PALOMA"

"LIKE SPEARS- AND THEY ZIG AND ZAG."

"I THINK THE TERM IS 'ALTERNATE' LEAVES..."

"AH! THUS THE LATIN NAME, UMBELLULARIA"

"TEENY TINY -YELLOWISH GREEN IN LITTLE UMBRELLAS"





*More About The California Bay Tree or
California Bay Laurel*
(also very well known as Oregon Myrtle)

by Jane Valencia
published in Plant Healer Magazine, Vol 1, No. 2 – Spring 2011

This tree is a good reason why we have scientific names for plants (and for animals and fungi too). *Umbellularia californica* has a lot of common names, plus the interesting twist that on one side of the state line the tree is most definitely known as **Oregon Myrtle**, and on the other (in California) it is mostly known as **California Bay** or **California Laurel** or **California Bay Laurel**, as well as a sprinkling of other names.

California Bay tends to like moist areas, so is found in coastal forests. You can also find it growing in oak woodlands that are moist, such as those found near the Oregon coast and in the very northernmost part of California. You may also find this tree in the western foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains.



The leaves can indeed be used to make a medicinal tea -- just crush two to four leaves and steep them in just-boiled water for 10-20 minutes.

Not only can you drink the tea to help ease lots of different kinds of headaches (even headaches caused by inhaling the aroma of the leaves), but drinking the tea can help ease cramps of various kinds -- including cramps caused by diarrhea and food poisoning.

You can use the tea as a wash for sores, and to soothe rashes caused by poison oak (a native plant that we learn very quickly to be wary of

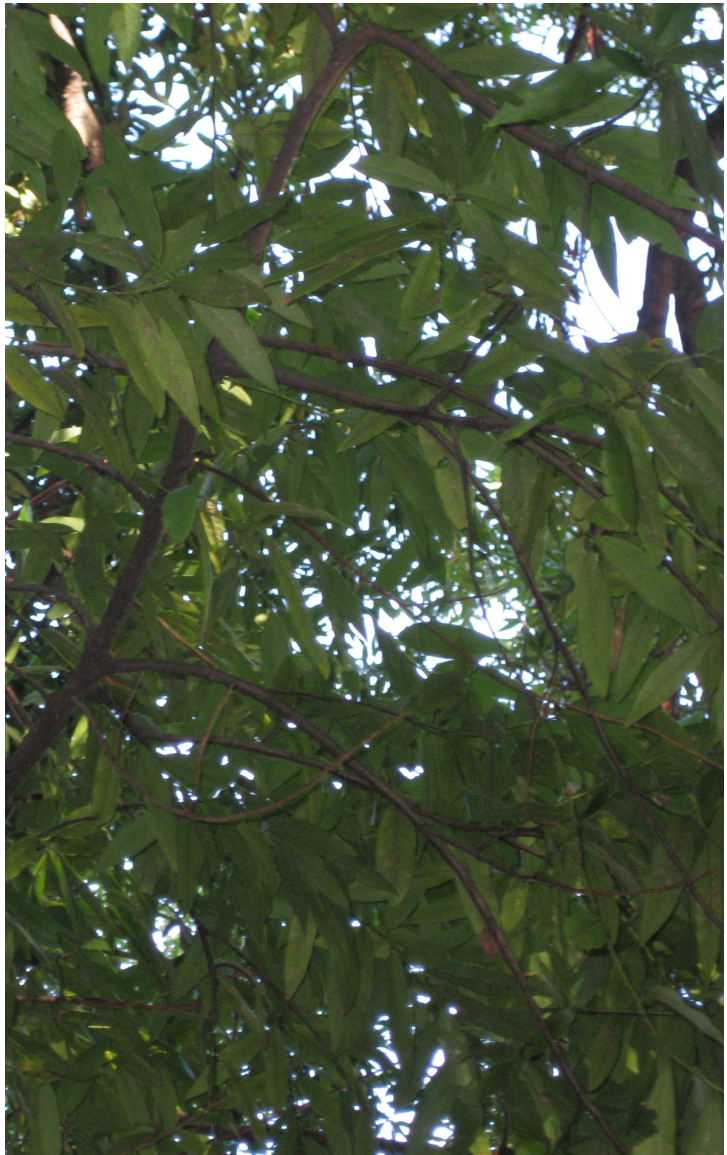
in California's oak woodlands!). You can dip a cotton ball in the tea and use it like smelling salts, to help revive someone who feels faint or who has fainted.

Poultices can be used to ease rheumatism.

The leaves of the California Bay/Oregon Myrtle can be used as substitutes for the bay leaves sometimes called for in recipes, and were indeed used to by some native peoples to flavor salmon and deer and other foods. The California Bay Leaf has a sharper, stronger flavor than the culinary bay leaf, the Mediterranean *Laurus nobilis*, so less is definitely more when you use them this way.

In addition to using the leaves for medicinal teas and flavor native peoples of California and Oregon also gathered the fruit, a round greenish-purple berry with a hard inner seed resembling that of a miniature avocado (and indeed the Avocado is a near relative to California Bay). Leaving the "nuts" (the seed) to dry in the sun, some peoples just peeled off and ate the leathery outer coverings of the fruit.

Foragers today roast the nuts and eat them, and really love them (or hate them) for their coffee and bitter chocolate-like flavor and stimulating properties. You can get an edgy coffee "buzz" from the nuts, so if you or your family decide to try



them out as a food, just eat sparingly until you understand how the nut affects you. See the article listed below,

"Paleotechnics: The California Bay Laurel" by Steven Edholm & Tamara Wilder for lots of detailed information about how to roast the nuts.

Of course, many of you reading the comic and this note probably don't have *Umbellularia californicus* in your neighborhood. But perhaps a tree in your neighborhood also has a strong, fragrant scent. If you breathe deeply, can you imagine how the smell might affect you if you, say, had a headache? Is it that kind of headache-clearing scent, or does the smell have a very different quality?

Let your imagination wander -- what might the leaves or other parts of this tree be used for to help your body? Then go and do a little research. Check in a field guide like **Peterson's Guide to Medicinal Plants And Herbs** (available in many libraries) or an ethonobotany guide (ethnobotany is the study of how different cultures use or used their regional plants) to discover how the tree was used by people native to your place.

You may discover that a tree in your neighborhood has similar qualities to California Bay -- or properties quite different, quite unique to itself. No doubt you'll discover how your tree tells its own story -- through its scent and feel, by its shape, leaves, bark, and roots, and by the soil and amount of moisture it likes. The animals and birds that visit the tree, or the plants that live near it also tell the story of the tree and its many qualities.

Have fun exploring!



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