

NEWS RELEASE
October 23, 2002

ACORNS ABOUND ABUNDANTLY

BACKYARD HORTICULTURE

By Gary W. Hickman, Horticulture Advisor
University of California Cooperative Extension, Mariposa County

This year seems to be producing a bumper crop of acorns in Mariposa, at least for the Blue Oaks, *Quercus douglasii*. This tree is common from about 300 to 3,500 feet elevation, and as the common name implies, the leaves have a pale blue-green tint. This tree produces good acorn crops every two to three years, with exceptional crops every five to eight years. Research reports show blue oaks can produce 50 to 150 pounds of acorns per tree in a good year. Considering all the insects and other animals that consider this food a delicacy, it is probably a good thing the tree is so prolific. Woodpeckers, jays, quail, squirrels, and deer all eat this high protein fruit.

If you want to collect blue oak acorns to plant, there are several insects to watch for in the nuts. The filbert weevil had found several of the acorns collected just this past weekend, and more have the noticeable small holes, indicating presence of the larvae. This insect can destroy 20-60 percent of the acorn crop. After collecting, discard any acorns with small holes or other feeding damage. The float test is also a good method of determining good seed. Keep the sinkers, as the floaters often have been damaged by insects or are not mature.

Unlike some other oaks, blue oak acorns do not need a cold period to germinate. They can actually start growing within a month of seed fall under the right conditions. Most, however, germinate in the early spring when soil moisture is present. Acorns can

be stored up to six months, if kept cool and do not dry out. Adding peat moss or sawdust, place the seeds in plastic bags in the refrigerator. When planting, the acorns need to be covered, either with loose soil or organic matter. The planting hole should be ten inches wide and five inches deep. Replace the soil and place six to ten acorns, tips down or sideways, on top of the soil. Cover with remaining soil and organic matter and tamp down. Since insects and other animals will probably come looking for your newly planted forest, protective screens should be considered, especially once the seeds germinate.

For more information on oaks, call the University of California Cooperative Extension office in Mariposa, 966-2417, and ask for “Living Among the Oaks” leaflet.

The University of California prohibits discrimination against or harassment of any person employed by or seeking employment with the University on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, physical or mental disability, medical condition (cancer-related or genetic characteristics), ancestry, marital status, age, sexual orientation, citizenship, or status as a covered veteran (special disabled veteran, Vietnam-era veteran or any other veteran who served on active duty during a war or in a campaign or expedition for which a campaign badge has been authorized). University Policy is intended to be consistent with the provisions of applicable State and Federal laws. Inquiries regarding the University’s nondiscrimination policies may be directed to the Affirmative Action/Staff Personnel Services Director, University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources, 1111 Franklin, 6th Floor, Oakland, CA 94607-5200, (510) 987-0096.