Umbellularia californica (Hooker & Arnott) Nutt. Tree or large shrub, evergreen, several-stemmed at base, in range 4–15 m tall; shoots with leathery leaves, puberulent becoming glabrescent, strongly aromatic like culinary bay (*Laurus nobilis*); bark on branches dull gray aging brownish, on very old trunk deeply fissured and horizontally cracked. **Stems:** cylindric becoming ± knobby with persistent leaf bases and leaf scars, tough. **Leaves:** helically alternate, simple, petiolate, without stipules; petiole hemi-cylindric but channeled at base, 7–15 mm long; blade elliptic to lanceolate or oblong-lanceolate, 30–110 × (7–)15–33 mm, tapered to broadly tapered at base, entire and colorless on margins, acute at tip, pinnately veined, dull to shiny, lower surface with minute dots (ethereal oil glands within mesophyll). **Inflorescence:** paniclelike to racemelike in bud, at anthesis each bud expanding to form an umbel-like cluster (pseudowhorl) of 6–10 flowers, inflorescence appearing terminal but sometimes with a vegetative bud (= a new vegetative shoot), lateral axes (peduncles) 2–20 mm long, subtended by an early-deciduous bract or sometimes the lower ones subtended by a persistent small leaf; bud of umbel-like cluster enclosed by 3 bracts, the bracts cupped-round or hoodlike, 4–6 mm long, puberulent, outer bracts rose-tinted to brownish, soon deciduous; bractlets subtending pedicel (except the central one) roundish to ± oblanceolate, 1.5–4 mm long, puberulent, greenish or yellowish white; pedicel at anthesis typically 1.5–3 mm long, puberulent. **Flower:** bisexual, radial, 5–7 mm across; **tepals** 6(–7) in 2 whorls, spreading, cupped-obovate, 3–3.5 mm long, greenish yellow to pale yellow, obtuse to round at tip, with short straight hairs on inner surface at base and along midvein; **stamens** 12 in 4 whorls, inner whorl sterile (= 3 staminodes); fertile stamens dimorphic, 1.5–2 mm long, outer 6 stamens spatulate with 4 circular, pale yellow anther sacs on inner surface, inner 3 fertile stamens ± clublike with a pair of stalked orange glands attached to filament base and with 4 anther sacs, the 2 upper sacs ± on edge and 2 lower sacs on outer surface, opening by uplifting valves; pollen yellow, clumped; staminodes club-shaped, 0.7–1 mm long; **pistil** 1, 2–2.5 mm long; ovary superior, conic, ± 1 mm long, light green, 1-chambered with 1 ovule; style thick and often bent, pale green; stigma flaring to rimlike. **Fruit:** drupe, typically solitary or in pairs, ovoid-spheric, 20–25 mm long, green with whitish spots when fresh turning deep purple when dried, glabrous, with shallowly lobed or scalloped perianth forming a cuplike base; stone (endocarp) subspheroid, 15–18 mm wide, with faint ridge on one side to pointed tip. (Late-September) Late-November–early April.

Native. Evergreen tree of riparian woodland and southern oak woodland throughout the range. When crushed, the elliptic leaves of *Umbellularia californica* produce the characteristic aroma of commercial bay (*Laurus nobilis*), and can be used as a substitute. Because the flower buds are already on shoots of the previous season, this tree species is typically the first to produce flowers in late fall at the beginning of the rainy season, often at the same time or in advance of the earliest flowering chaparral shrubs. In the coldest winters, flowering may be delayed until mid-January, and in certain years the flowers can be found beginning in late September, when stimulated by late summer rains. Our plants have been referred to as variety *californica*, but there seems little justification to accept varieties of California laurel because the differences are minor.
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