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In 2017, Greenspace will step up to the challenge of protecting the land, water and ecosystems of San Luis Obispo County's splendid North Coast. We invite you to join us in carrying out land purchase and restoration, public environmental education and environmental policy advocacy. Please fill out and return the enclosed donation form for your Annual Fund gift, or go to www.greenspacecambria.org and click on the Donate Now button. Automatic monthly gifts can be given via PayPal. Thank you, and a joyous holiday season to you all!

THE HOLLY AND THE IVY

Nothing says Christmas in California like toyon. It's been part of my life since I was a little girl riding my slow brown horse across the hills on our family ranch. As you drive around San Luis Obispo County this holiday season, you too may be struck by the beautiful red berry clusters that seem to glow on the boughs of large bright green bushes.

Also known as western holly and Christmas berry, toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*) is a key native species found only in California and the very southernmost part of Oregon. It is part of the coastal sage scrub zone, which extends along the coast as far south as the Mexican border, and also can be found in the Sierra foothills. An unusual member of the *Rosaceae* family, it is the sole member of the genus *Heteromeles*.

Its long leathery leaves with their short petioles enable it to tolerate dry summers and even prolonged drought. Their spiny edges provide some protection against deer for the mature leaves, though our neighborhood herbivores enjoy the tender new leaves, which is why many Cambria toyons have bare trunks to a height of about five feet. The bushes are evergreen.

In late spring and summer, toyon bushes burst with flat clusters of white flowers. If you examine these closely, you'll see that they look very much like blackberry flowers, or tiny wild roses. To which, in fact, they are related as distant cousins in the same family. The flowers don't last all that long and soon green berries begin to form at the ends of each short flower stem.

By October, the fruit sets, turning first a rusty brown and then maturing into large heavy clusters of glossy red berries.



Toyon Berries

Photo: Connie Gannon

There is some debate about the edibility of toyon berries. They do contain trace amounts of cyanide, which could be toxic if one were to eat several pounds of raw fruit. Deer, squirrels, jays and coyotes don't seem to have much trouble eating them raw, though I have seen hordes of robins descend on stands of toyon, strip the berries and then do the aerial equivalent of staggering off from a bender.

Because they are a native plant, they make excellent landscape specimens for our seasonally dry climate.

Following are instructions for planting from seed, courtesy of the USDA:

"Clean off as much of the pulp as possible and then put the fresh seeds in water and let them rot for one

week. This is a good technique for getting the seed separated from the fleshy part of the fruit. If the seeds have been stored, they need three months stratification before planting.

Plant the seeds directly in the ground in the fall and water them. Plant them in full sun in almost any soil type. If the seedlings come up too thick, thin them. This shrub makes a magnificent hedge plant and birds love the fruits. Seeds may also be planted in containers for the first year and then planted out in the second fall.

“*Cuttings*: Cut 4-5 inch tips of the semi ripe wood in early summer and strip off the lower half of the leaves and dip each cutting into a rooting hormone. Put the cuttings into a rooting medium such as perlite-sand in four-inch pots spaced about one-half inch apart. Keep the pots watered and sheltered from wind and direct sun. The cuttings take about two to three months to root. New growth on the tops of the plants signifies root development. After rooting, transplant each plant into individual pots....

“Plant each plant in a light, loose soil in partial shade, and water it, keeping it moist and protecting it from hot sun, winds, and animals. The following fall if the plant is growing vigorously, plant it out in full sun. If the plant is small and grows slowly, wait a second year and plant it outdoors the following fall.”

This article is a kind of good news/bad news story, as we turn now to a non-native plant that is wreaking



Cape Ivy

Photo credit: Cal-IPC.org

havoc around Cambria, especially along Santa Rosa Creek and up the canyon between Tin City and the Cambria Nursery. Commonly known as Cape ivy, *Delairea odorata* grows as a vine, clambering over just about anything in its way. Its shiny five- or six-pointed leaves are flexible and yellow-green, unlike English ivy with its leathery dark green foliage. In spring and summer, the plant blooms with clusters of 20+ yellow flowers, each about 3/8” inch across.

Cape ivy is extremely invasive. Originally from the humid highland forests of South Africa, it was introduced as an ornamental in the U.S. during the 19th century. Its presence in California began with planting in Golden Gate Park in the 1950s. Over 500,000 acres in California now have been overrun by its vines. It propagates by stolons (runners) or fragments of these.

It is especially noxious in riparian (watercourse) areas, where it chokes out native vegetation and competes effectively with native trees for nutrients. According to geologist David Chipping, it prefers shaded disturbed soil and can impact local forest habitats as well (1993).

If you want to get a good look at Cape ivy locally, drive down Burton from the intersection with Eton and look to your right. The small canyon is filled with it. One of the dangers of its invasion of forested areas like this is that it prevents germination of dropped pine seeds and regeneration of the native forest. It also deprives fauna of food sources, as its alkaloids are toxic to most animals.

Cape ivy management is a major challenge. To avoid extensive and uncertainly effective use of herbicides, manual removal has been used with varying success in Marin, San Francisco and Santa Cruz. The technique involves initial clearing of plant material to see where the rooting stems are. All such cleared plant material must be gathered carefully to avoid breaking and scattering of stolons and bagged to prevent reestablishment. According to the California Invasive Plant Council website (www.cal-ipc.org/ip/management/), “roots and stems must be teased out of the ground using a pointed or three-pronged mini-rake to loosen the soil.... Removed cape ivy should be placed in or on plastic and, if feasible, removed from the area. Manual control is sometimes followed with spot chemical treatment of re-sprouts.”

Greenspace will offer a workshop, Native Plants and Defensible Space this spring for interested residents and vegetation workers. Please contact the office, 805/927-2866, for more information. --CG

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The North Coast area of San Luis Obispo County is a national treasure. Greenspace will protect and enhance its ecological systems, cultural resources and marine habitats through land acquisition, education and advocacy.