**Acorn Prep for Food**

By Lanny Kaufer

Harvest

Any acorns of the oak species *Quercus* can be used for food. All our local species contain tannin and must be leached before eating. Some Chumash prefer coast live oak (*Q. agrifolia*) for flavor and nutrition. The meat has a dark yellow color, possibly indicating higher Vitamin A content. Valley oak (*Q. lobata*) produces much larger acorns of a tan color so you can make more flour with less time harvesting. Valley oaks usually drop their acorns first, usually in September. The Chumash say to leave the first drop for the deer. After that, spread a tarp under the tree and shake the branches. Do not pick them from the tree as they will not be ripe and will be more tannic.

Culling

Discard all acorns showing a tiny exit hole where an oak weevil larva left after eating the meat.

Dry Acorns

Lay the acorns in the sun to dry for a few days with a screen over them to keep birds and squirrels from them.

Shell

Stand each acorn on its point and hit the other end (the end that was in the cup) with a hammer to split it open. Use pliers to hold the acorn if you’re worried about hitting your fingers. Remove the acorn from the shell.

Pound and Grind

Place a handful of dry, shelled acorns in a molcajete (stone mortar and pestle) and pound them into little pieces with the pestle. Then grind them to as fine a meal as you can. The finer the meal, the better the leaching water will penetrate the meal. If the meal is damp and gummy when you’re grinding it, the acorns were not dry enough and should be dried some more. For the best quality meal, you can shake the ground meal through a metal strainer and regrind the larger pieces left in the strainer.

Leach

Place the meal in a jar with 10-20 times water to the amount of meal. Stir and let sit until the meal settles to the bottom and the water is a little cloudy but mostly clear. Carefully pour the water off the top leaving the meal in the jar. Repeat this step two more times. The water should be clearer each time. Taste the water. If it does not taste astringent (tannic), the meal is ready. Otherwise, repeat the leaching until the meal is ready. The wet meal can be used as it is, simply cooking it for mush or adding it to recipes by reducing the amount of liquid in the recipe.

Dry meal

If you want to store the meal, dry it in an oven on the lowest setting and check it to make sure it’s not roasting. This step is not for cooking the meal, just drying it for storing.

Cook or Bake

The acorn meal can be cooked on the stovetop as you would cornmeal mush or substituted for part of the wheat flour in pancake, bread, cookie and other recipes. Acorns do not contain gluten so foods will not rise if made with 100% acorn meal.