

Plant of the Month

Corylus cornuta var. cornuta – beaked hazelnut

Family: Betulaceae, birch family

Habit: Small tree growing up to 6 meters tall; older bark is light to dark brown and smooth; new growth smooth to minutely hairy and twigs are greenish to yellowish tan to light brown; leaves narrowly elliptic to ovate, 5-12 cm long with an acuminate tip, leaf margins coarsely double-toothed, surface is smooth to slightly hairy; male flowers are arranged in long, pale clusters called catkins, female flowers are bud-like and have bright red styles at the tip; nuts clustered in groups of 2-6, contained within a tubular, bristly husk. Flowers June – August.



Habitat: Cool ravines and gulches, along creeks, and as an understory plant in Douglas-fir forests. 5,500 to 7,500 feet. Can be found on BCPOS properties such as Betasso Preserve and Walker Ranch.

The genus *Corylus* is derived from the Greek word korus which means helmet and is in reference to the hardness and shape of the nut. *Cornuta* is the Latin word for horned which refers to the beaked husk that surrounds the nut. The husk is covered in fine, prickly hairs that irritate the skin. *Corylus cornuta* is a short multi-stemmed suckering tree that can form thickets. Male and female flowers are separate but occur on the same plant (monoecious) and rely on wind for pollination. The catkins appear in the fall near the branch tips and open the following spring. The female flowers develop in early spring and are surrounded by leafy bracts with only the bright red stigmas visible. Nuts are produced on branches from 2-18 years of age and ripen September to October. Forgotten caches made by small mammals are critical to seed dispersal. The tree responds well to trimming or fire and will produce flowering branches 1-2 years after disturbance.

Indigenous peoples ate and traded the nuts and used the flexible branches to make baskets and traps. The nuts may be eaten raw or roasted and crushed to be incorporated into cakes with berries, meat, or animal fat. The nuts are smaller than commercially produced hazelnuts (European hazelnut, *Corylus avellana*) but are said to taste similar. Good luck finding one as they are a highly sought after food source for squirrels, birds, rodents, and bears.



Male flower or catkin



Female flower

Sources:

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