



California Flannelbush

Fremontodendron californicum

April 2016

Field Notes

General Description

The common name flannelbush comes from the leaves' soft flannel-like appearance. But do not be fooled! The leaves have tiny stellate hairs (middle picture) on them that can easily break off when touched and irritate skin. The genus *Fremontodendron* is named for John C. Fremont, a military officer, western US explorer and plant collector, California senator, and presidential candidate. Also called Fremont's tree, this woody plant has the growth form of a shrub or small tree. Large, tree-like individuals can be up to 30ft (10m) tall and 13in (33cm) in diameter. Regarded by some as the one of the most spectacular plants in California, this member of the plant family Malvaceae or Sterculiaceae (depending on who you ask), has yellow (or sometimes red) flowers about 3in (7.5cm) wide (below). Blooms can be dramatic, with flowers so profuse they hide the leaves, giving the appearance of only having yellow flowers (far right). This plant has been documented to grow very fast during the spring, putting on 5-8ft (1.5-2.5m) of height in good conditions.



Photo: 2015 Eugene Sturla

Ecology

Flannelbush is drought-tolerant and prefers well-drained soils. Flannelbush is well-adapted to landscapes with recurring fires, responding with abundant seed production, prolific sprouting from the root crown, and rapid growth. Individuals can reach maturity relatively quickly (usually within two years). Seeds can spread via animals or wind into fire-opened areas.



Close-up view of tiny hairs on flannelbush leaves that give the plant a soft, fuzzy appearance. Photo: © 2003 Stewart R. Hinsley

Habitat and Distribution

Flannelbush grows in Mediterranean climates and is widespread in California along the coast range, Sierra Nevada, and southern mountain ranges. It is a characteristic plant of chaparral communities. Outside of California, it extends eastward into central Arizona and southward into northern Baja California, Mexico. Over its range, flannelbush is found on all topographic aspects in foothills and low elevation mountains. In California and northern Mexico, flannelbush often occurs on granitic slopes from 3,000 to 6,000ft (900-1,800m).

Where Found in the Klamath Network

This species is only found in Whiskeytown NRA, but is not common.

Ethnobotany

Leaves are tough enough to have been used by early settlers to pad their shoes (presumably after knocking the leaf hairs off). As a traditional Native American medicinal plant, the inner bark's sap was used as a topical remedy for mucous membrane irritation and an internal remedy for gastrointestinal upset, by some of the indigenous peoples of California. The Californian Yokut and Kawaiisu peoples used the wood for building and furniture material; they also used the bark for cordage and nets for snare hunting and caching acorns.



Photo: www.laspilitas.com

More Information

<http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/plants/shrub/frecal/all.html>

http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/home_blog/2011/02/stunning-flannel-bush-comes-with-prickly-problems.html