

Rhus L. SUMAC

Rhus ovata S. Watson, SUGAR BUSH. Shrub or small tree, evergreen, sclerophyllous, highly branched with a dense, rounded canopy, vegetative growth beginning after spring flowering arising from axillary buds below old inflorescences, in range 150–800 cm tall; gynodioecious; shoots with leathery leaves often folded upward from midrib, weakly short-hairy becoming glabrescent, strongly aromatic when cut or crushed (having resin ducts with terpenes). **Stem:** limber, young twigs < 6 mm diameter, tough, initially red and puberulent, young periderm dull gray and brown, with crescent-shaped leaf scars; bark on principal branches gray, containing resin ducts. **Leaves:** helically alternate, simple, petiolate, without stipules; petiole somewhat flattened on upper side, 8–30 mm long, reddish, sparsely short-strigose; blade broadly ovate to broadly elliptic (roundish), (30–)50–95(–130) × (19–)35–68 mm, broadly tapered and slightly oblique at base, entire or dentate with shallow, pointed teeth on margins, sometimes wavy, acute at tip, pinnately veined with midrib slightly raised and arched-recurved on lower surface and other principal veins scarcely sunken or not on both surfaces, semiglossy, glabrate or inconspicuously short-strigose along midrib. **Inflorescence:** panicle of spikes having either pistillate flowers or bisexual flowers (separate individuals), terminal, inflorescence with tight buds formed during summer to open next spring, spikes 3–10+ per panicle, densely clustered, sometimes a branch with several spikes, each spike to 20 mm long having a short stalk below bracts and flowers, flowers clustered in a tight helix without internodes, while flowering 8–12 mm diameter, many-flowered, with flowers formed in 5 files, bracteate; axes knobby and never straight, canescent even on bark; bract subtending lateral branch awl-shaped, 2–5 mm long, ± keeled; with pulvinuslike swelling on upper side of branch axis; bractlet subtending flower cupped-ovate, 2–2.5 × 2.5–3 mm, thick and leathery, brown to reddish brown or rose with thin, paler margins, midvein visible, densely short-strigose to canescent, persistent; pedicel short, tough, with dense tuft of short white hairs beneath flower, with 2 bracteoles beneath tuft of hairs, the bracteoles subopposite (not 180° apart), spreading, cupped-ovate, ca. 1.5–2 mm, thick and leathery, tannish white often tinged rose on lower surface, persistent. **Bisexual flower:** radial, 3.5–7 mm across; **sepals** 5, overlapped, cupped-roundish to cupped-elliptic, 2–2.5 × 1.5–2.5 mm, thickish, pale green with colorless margins or rose with pinkish margins when flowers pink, densely short-ciliate on margins; **petals** 5, ascending but sharply bend over stiff sepals and then spreading, cupped-obovate (short-spatulate), 3.8–6 mm long, stiff, white to pink, upper (inner) surface short-pilose below midpoint and along center line and short-ciliate on margins, upper portion sometimes twisted; **stamens** 5, free; filaments erect, ascending between lobes of nectary, 3–4 × 0.4 mm, white or pink, somewhat bent at base, narrow approaching anther, short-villous to midpoint; anthers dorsifixed, dithecal, ± 1.5 mm long, light yellow, longitudinally dehiscent; pollen light yellow; **nectary disc** between filaments and base of ovary, ringlike and 10-lobed, 0.3 mm long and thick, light to dark orange; **pistil** 1, 1.5–1.7 mm long; ovary superior, compressed-ovate, white, densely glandular hairy, 1-chambered with 1 ovule; styles (2–)3, erect and appressed to each other, club-shaped, 0.5–0.7 mm long, glossy greenish yellow; stigmas oblique on outer side. **Pistillate flower:** radial, 3.5–5 mm across; **sepals** 5, overlapping, cupped-roundish to cupped-elliptic, 2–2.5 × 1.5–2.5 mm, thickish, pale green with colorless margins or rose with

pinkish margins when flowers pink, densely short-ciliate on margins; **petals** 5, erect, oval-elliptic, 2.5–3 mm long, stiff and somewhat crisped, white to pink, upper (inner) surface short-pilose below midpoint and along center line and short-ciliate on upper portion; **stamens** absent or 5 and short-abortive; **nectary disc** between filaments and ovary, ringlike and 10-lobed, 0.3 mm long and thick, brownish red; **pistil** 1, 1.5–2 mm long; ovary superior, compressed-ovate, white, densely glandular hairy, 1-chambered with 1 ovule; styles (2–)3, erect and appressed, club-shaped, 0.5–0.7 mm long, glossy pinkish; stigmas oblique on outer side, reddish to burgundy. **Fruit:** drupelike, with 1 stone, asymmetrically compressed-ovoid, ca. 7–8 × 6 mm, blushed red to rose, densely glandular-hairy; stone discoid, ca. 5.5 × 4.5 mm, greenish. Early March–early June.

Native. Sclerophyllous evergreen shrub of tall chaparral and southern oak woodland, even persisting on slopes where freezing occurs. *Rhus ovata* has easily recognized, evergreen leaves, often being dark green and having either white or pink flowers; darker inflorescences are due mainly to the intensity in color of the sepals, bracteoles, and bractlets. In SMM there are certain populations that appear to be of hybrid origin with *R. integrifolia*, including intermediate leaf forms (Mandeville Canyon, SMM), and some botanists hold the point of view that most materials in range are not true *R. ovata*, although it is fairly simple for an amateur to distinguish the typical species.

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