

Sudden Oak Death

The recent appearance and rapid spread of 'sudden oak death,' or SOD, in the hills of the California coast range provides an unnerving object lesson in the inherent dangers and potentially dire consequences of the introduction of non-native species into the wild. The cause of SOD, *Phytophthora*, is a new pathogen that aggressively colonizes the tissue of four of our native oak species—tan oak, coast live oak, interior live oak, and California black oak. Apparently, *Phytophthora* arrived in California as a stowaway on the root stock of ornamental European rhododendrons. A recent study estimated that SODS infected trees cover 219 square miles of coastal forests between Humboldt and Monterey counties. In the San Francisco Bay area, 13-37% of the oaks have symptoms. These acorn bearing trees are critical to numerous wildlife species. Deer, turkeys, jays, quail, squirrels, and acorn woodpeckers are just a few of the many species that rely heavily on acorns as a food source. Now it is feared that the magnificent native Rhododendron groves of the North coast will succumb to the infestation.

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