Rare California Nutmeg

By MARGARET KOCH Sentinel Staff Writer

There is a rare tree growing wild in Santa Cruz

The California Nutmeg Tree, Torreya Californica, a member of the Yew Family.

According to the late Willis Linn Jepson, father of California Tree research and author of THE definitive volumes on trees, the Califor-nia Nutmeg is widespread in the Santa Cruz Mountains but is common nowhere . . . it's a rare tree. And no one knows who first discovered

California Nutmeg grows along Steven's Creek in Santa Clara County, just over the line; it grows in Big Basin, Little Basin, Swanton and on Mount Umunhum . scattered over Santa Cruz County, usually along creek

bottoms or on moist mountainsides

Jepson says of it: "...a handsome dark green tree 15 to 90 feet high with a trunk up to three feet in diameter.

The nutmegs are elliptical fruits resembling olives or plums, either green colored or green with purple as they ripen.

Catkins form in June and July. The nutmegs appear in September or October. were gathered and

roasted and eaten as a great delicacy, by the California Indians.

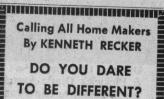
The early-day woodsmen called the tree the "Stinking Yew." Not a very pretty name for such a beautiful tree. But they named it for the wood, which is very odorous when cut.

The California Nutmeg also grows in a few areas of the Sierra Nevada Range, but away from the fog-bound coast it is a much smaller tree, and not nearly so impressive in size and shape.

There are two kinds of nutmeg trees, the female and

male. Sentinel Photographe Pete Amos visited the Fran McCrary Ranch near Swar ton to get photos of two es pecially magnificent speci mens. He also got a sho of the nutmeg fruits -Agnes McCrary had save a few from the tree in her garden.

But don't try to use the nutmegs as you would the commercial variety — they are not related. The California Nutmeg tree is not commercial nutmeg at all. It is a curiosity — a rarity and a delight to the eye. It grows only in California.



Design experts are often saddened with the great amount of

uniformity they see in home fur-nishings of too many of our homes. When they

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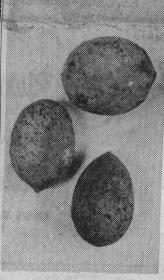


Above, the sprays of the male nutmeg tree hang gracefully from every branch . . . below, the nutmeg fruits, which are not true nutmegs but which are elible.





The male California Nutmeg above is characterized by its dropping branches and long fronds ... both it and the magnificent female nutmeg tree below, are on the Frank McCrary Ranch near Swanton.



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