Valley Oak

The valley oak is the highest form of vegetation in this region, the climax plant. It is deciduous, with leaves 3 to 4 inches long and 2 to 3 inches broad yellowish green above and paler beneath. The leaves are parted nearly to the midrib into paired lobes. The acorn is long and conical with a warty cap, and the bark is thick and checkered.

Native peoples depended on the acorn as a staple of their diet. The tannin from the bark was used in tanning hides. The large oak apple galls were mixed with rusty iron to make ink. Acorns are still an important food item for squirrels, deer, and some birds. Acorn woodpeckers store the nuts for food and for the insect larvae they may contain. In addition, the valley oak hosts over one hundred species of galls of all types-leaf, root, bark and stem.

Other common riparian trees at Bobelaine are the box elder, black and sandbar willow, California or white alder, Oregon ash and California black walnut.

Galls

The myriad forms and shapes of galls, from the largest "oak apple" to the tiniest leaf gall, are caused by tiny wasps or other insects that pierce the plant tissue to lay their eggs, stimulating the plant cells to abnormal growth. Oaks are host to over 100 gall types on stems, leaves, roots and branches. Willows, roses and cottonwoods all have their own galls. Sift through a pile of oak leaves looking closely at each one and see how many different types of leaf galls you can find.

Fremont Cottonwood

Named after early explorer John C. Fremont, cottonwoods were a welcome sight to early explorers—a sign of water in arid lands. The leaves are bright green and triangular or roundish, with leaf stalks flattened to allow the leaves to flutter in the slightest breeze. The bark is light gray and deeply furrowed in older trees. The female trees form grape-like clusters of seed pods that open into cottony masses when the seeds are ripe. The male trees form dangling reddish catkins in early spring. Cottonwoods host a distinctive gall that forms as a large smooth swelling on the leaf stem.

California Sycamore

A member of the plane tree family, the bare white trunks and branches of the sycamore are conspicuous in winter. The sheets of bark are shed annually. The leaf is large and palmate, somewhat like a maple leaf in shape. The dangling seed balls are approximately one inch in diameter.