

# Oak Galls

## Nature's Living Ornaments

Red candy kisses, pink cups, green golf balls, yellow marbles, fuchsia urchins; all the work of a group of tiny wasps. Cynipid wasps are smaller than fruit flies, yet they produce these unusual and beautiful galls on oak trees. The female cynipid wasp first stings the leaf, bud, stem or acorn of the oak and then lays an egg on the wound. The oak reacts by growing a protective layer around the egg, which provides nutrition and protection to the young wasp larvae and protects the tree from damage. The chemicals produced by the sting and larvae determine the shape and color of the gall. Each gall is unique to a single species of wasp.

### Try This:

Closely examine the leaves, stems, branches and buds of the valley oak above you. You should be able to spot at least three different types of galls. LOOK, BUT DON'T PICK! Now look at a nearby blue oak to see a different set of galls. Often, one tree like the valley oak above you will be covered with galls, but a neighboring tree will have just a few.

