Orchard Gro-Sheet # 21

Native California Plants Suitable for Growing Under Oaks

Coast Live Oaks (*Quercus agrifolia*) are one of California's signature trees, defining the landscape of the coastal plains, valleys, and foothills. Of considerable economic value, they can also be tremendous assets in our gardens. Cooled by their shade, humbled by their venerable character, and connected to nature by the habitat they provide for many other creatures, we benefit immeasurably from these wonderful trees.

Trees that have matured in sync with our Mediterranean climate of cool wet winters and warm dry summers are susceptible to both crown rot and oak root fungus, soil-borne diseases that are favored by moisture and warm temperatures. Therefore, it is advisable to keep summer irrigation in and around establish trees to a minimum. On the other hand, very young oaks on your property or ones you plant from nursery stock will be much more resistant to these pathogens and tolerant of summer watering, but why irrigate trees that don't need it?

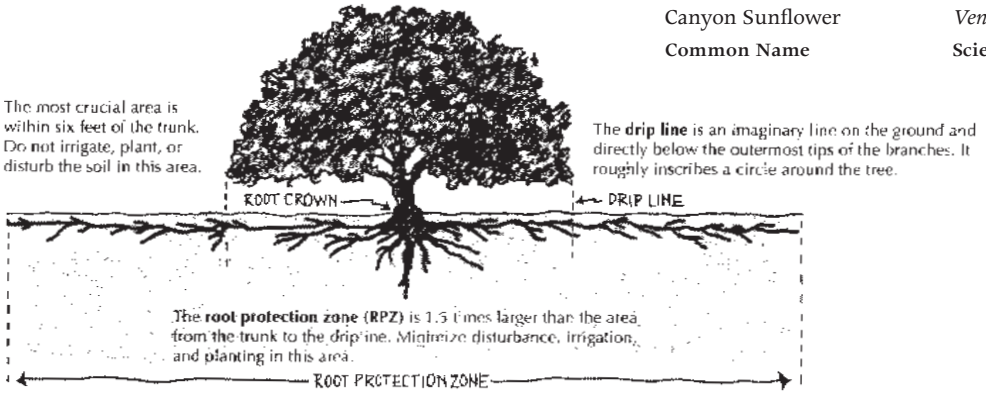
The following lists consist of native California plants (and a few non-native recommendations) that are suitable for planting under Coast Live Oak or Valley Oak (*Q. lobata*) trees. None of these understory species should be planted within six feet of the trunk, however. Although all will perform well under shaded and drought conditions, their appearance will improve with once-monthly summer watering and increased 1ight resulting from pruning dead or diseased branches in the oak tree canopy.

It is important to evaluate the quality of shade under your oak tree. Shade is a relative term. Plants closer to the edge of the canopy will probably receive more light than those nearer the trunk. When planting, consider on which side of the tree the plant will be located. If on the south side, for example, it will receive more light than if planted on the north side. One should expect that with increasing shade, flowering will decrease for some species. And, realize that as your oak grows, you may need to change the plantings under and around the canopy.

Valley Oaks are much more resistant to oak root fungus (*Armillaria mellea*) than Coast Live Oaks and can, therefore, tolerate some summer watering. Although mature Valley Oaks do not need summer water, their disease resistance allows for the use of more thirsty species when landscaping beneath the canopy. Also, since Valley Oaks are winter deciduous, understory plantings will receive essentially full sun during the winter months.

A few tips to help with planting under oaks. Bear in mind that any root-zone disturbance and the watering needed to establish new plants may make under-tree landscaping hazardous to oaks. Plant in fall so winter rains can help establish new growth. Don't plant within 6 feet of the trunk and be sure that irrigation drains away from it. If plants need water through the first summer, use an above ground drip irrigation system.

Common Name	Scientific Name
ANNUALS	
Farewell to Spring	*Clarkia spp.*
Chinese Houses	*Collinsia heterophylla*
California Gilia	*Gilia achilleifolia*
Common Linanthus	*Linanthus parviflorus*
Five-spot	*Nemophila maculata*
Baby Blue Eyes	*Nemophila menziesii*
Phacelia	*Phacelia parryi*
Fiesta Flower	*Pholistoma racemosa*
PERENNIAL HERBS	
Wormwood	*Artemisia vulgaris*
Golden Stars	*Bloomeria crocea*
Fairy Lanterns	*Calochortus albus*
Golden Fairy Lanterns	*Calochortus amabilis*
Cyclamen	*Cyclamen hederifolium**
Parry's Larkspur	*Delphinium parry*
Shooting Star	*Dodecatheon clevelandii*
Live-forever	*Dudleya spp.*
California Fuchsia	*Epilobium californica*
Bishop's Hat	*Epimedium grandiflorum*
Leafy Daisy	*Erigeron foliosus*
Sulfur Buckwheat	*Eriogonum umbellatum var. polyanthemum*
Wood Strawberry	*Fragaria vesca*
Bear's Foot	*Helleborus foetidus**
Island Alum-root	*Heuchera maxima*
Douglas Iris	*Iris douglasiana*
Pacific Coast Hybrid Iris	*Iris 'PCH'*
Humboldt Lily	*Lilium humboldtii*
Coyote Mint	*Monardella villosa*
Sticky Cinquefoil	*Potentilla glandulosa*
California Buttercup	*Ranunculus californicus*
Hummingbird Sage	*Salvia spathacea*
Yerba Buena	*Satureja douglasii*
Checker Bloom	*Sidalcea malviflora*
Southern Indian Pink	*Silene laciniata*
Blue-eyed Grass	*Sisyrinchium bellum*
California Goldenrod	*Solidago californica*
Wood Mint	*Stachys bullata*
Meadow Rue	*Thalictrum polycarpum*
Canyon Sunflower	*Venegasia carpesioides*
Common Name	**Scientific Name**



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PERENNIAL GRASSES, SEDGES AND RUSHES

Thin grass	*Agrostis pallens*
Sedge	*Carex globosa*
Berkeley Sedge	*C. tumubcola*
Sedge	*C. subfusca*
Squirrel tail	*Elymus spp.*
Western Rye	*Elymus glaucus*
California Fescue	*Festuca californica*
Idaho Fescue	*Festuca idahoensis*
Western Fescue	*Festuca occidentalis*
Spreading Wire-grass	*Juncus patens*
Giant Rye	*Leymus condensatus*
Coast Range Melicgrass	*Melica imperfecta*
Deer grass	*Muhlenbergia rigens*
Foorhill Needlegrass	*Nassella lepida*

FERNS

California Maidenhair Fern	*Adiantum jordanii*
Southern Wood Fern	*Dryopteris arguta*
Coffee Fern	*Pellaea andromedifolia*
Bird's-foot Fern	*Pellaea mucronata*
California Goldback Fern	*Pentagramma triangularis*
Bracken Fern	*Pteridium aguilinum*
California Polypody	*Polypodium californicum*
Leather Leaf Fern	*Polypodium scouleri*

VINES

Dutchman's Pipe	*Aristolochia californica*
Chaparral Clematis	*Clematis lasiantha*
Creek Clematis	*Clematis ligusticifolia*
Bluebell Creeper	*Sollya heterophylla**

SHRUBS

Sonoma Manzanita	*Arctostaphylos densifiora* and cultivars (e.g. 'Howard McMinn')
Little Sur Manzanita	*Arctostaphylos edmundsii* and cultivars
Hooker Manzanita	*Arctostaphylos hookeri* and cultivars (e.g. 'Monterey Carpet')
Dwarf Oregon Grape	*Berberis aquifolium* and cultivars (e.g. 'Compacta')
Creeping Barberry	*Berberis repens*
Nevin Barberry	*B. nevinii*
Bush Anemone	*Carpenteria californica*
Pt. Reyes Ceanothus	*Ceanothus gloriosus* and cultivars
Carmel Creeper	*Ceanothus griseus* var. *horizontalis* and cultivars (e.g. 'Yankee Point')
Western Redbud	*Cercis occidentalis*
Mountain Mahogany	*Cercocarpus betuloides*
Summer-Holly	*Comarostaphylis diversifolia*
Bush Poppy	*Dendromecon rigida*
Sulfur Buckwheat	*Eriogonum umbellatum*
Catalina Silver-lace	*Enophyllum nevinii*
Island Snapdragon	*Galvezia speciosa*
Coast Tasselbush	*Garrya elliptica*
Toyon	*Heteromeles arbutifolia*
Cream Bush	*Holodiscus discolor*
Climbing Penstemon	*Keckiella cordifolia*
Pitcher Sage	*Lepechinia calycina*
Pitcher Sage	*Lepechinia fragrans*
Bush Monkey Flower	*Mimulus (Diplacus) aurantiacus*
Santa Cruz Island Oak	*Quercus parvula*
Holly-leafed Cherry	*Prunus ilicifolia*
Common Name	**Scientific Name**

SHRUBS

Catalina Cherry	*P. lyonii*
California Coffeeberry	*Rhamnus californica*
Redberry	*Rhamnus crocea*
Lemonadeberry	*Rhus integrifolia*
Sugar Bush	*Rhus ovata*
Golden Currant	*Ribes aureum var. gracillimum*
White Flowering Currant	*Ribes indecorum*
Chaparral Currant	*Ribes malvaceum* and cultivars
Pink Flowering Currant	*Ribes sanguineum var. glutinosum* and cultivars
Fuchsia-flowered Gooseberry	*Ribes speciosum*
Evergreen Currant	*Ribes viburnifolium*
Matilija Poppy	*Romneya coulteri*
California Wild Rose	*Rosa californica*
Purple Nightshade	*Solanum xanti*
Snowdrop Bush	*Styrax officinalis var. redivivus*
Snowberry	*Symphoricarpos mollis*
California Huckleberry	*Vaccinium ovatum*

**non-native plant, but highly recommended*

More Information on Native Oaks and landscaping with Native Plants

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