Cork Oak

Cork oak (Quercus suber) in Bed G, native to southwestern Europe and northwestern Africa, provides cork for bottle stoppers, floors, and insulation. Ancient Greeks allowed only priests to cut down cork oaks. Cork bark can be harvested every 9 to 14 years. Cork production is a sustainable industry, supporting many people and providing homes for many plant and animal species.

Plant Families

Bed H showcases some major plant families of Mediterranean climate regions.

Plants can be grouped into families of similar and presumably related genera and species.

Family | ORIGIN
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Botanical name ‘Cultivar’ | COMMON NAME

How to Read Our Plant Identification Labels

Family: Family names are given to plants sharing certain broad features, such as number and arrangement of flower petals.

Origin: The Mediterranean-climate region of which this plant is native.

Botanical Name: The two-part name unique to this plant recognized throughout the world.

Cultivar: A variety of this plant grown for its unique characteristics, such as flower color or growth habit (low growing or upright).

Common Name: The name the plant is commonly called. This can vary from country to country and region to region. Some plants have no common name, and many plants share the same common name.

Mediterranean Ethnobotany

Leaves of the bay laurel (Laurus nobilis) in Bed B flavor soups and stews and have been used as an antiseptic and to repel weevils in flour. An Olive (Olea europaea) and Pomegranate (Punica granatum) are among the laurel. The olive tree was sacred to Athena. Olives are eaten green or black and pressed for the cooking oil now prized for health benefits. Wood is used for carvings. Sweet/sour seeds of pomegranate fruits are eaten and grenade syrup is made from them for drinks.

In Greek mythology, Daphne (Greek for laurel) pleaded with her father, river god Peneus, to change her into a tree to avoid becoming Apollo’s wife. Apollo still loved her as a tree, wore a wreath of laurel leaves, and laurel trees were planted at temples dedicated to him.

The Future Garden

The Master Plan for this Garden was completed in 1998. Five major areas will each contain vegetation grouped in plant communities found in the wild in one of the five Mediterranean climate regions. Demonstration landscapes will highlight the beauty and water-conserving quality of these often rare plants. Development of the remaining acres awaits further funding.

FireSafe Demonstration Landscape

Dry summers encourage large wildfires. Homes built near natural spaces need fire-safe landscaping. Fire-safe gardens use fire-resistant plants and landscaping materials in zones near structures. Fire-resistant plants can also be water-efficient, low maintenance, and beautiful! This landscape features those plants.

This concludes the Self-Guided Tour. Continue up this path to our Children’s Garden, Oak Glen Pavilion and Eve’s Garden Shop. Here, you can shop for plants and other garden treasures, join our Garden and receive our helpful monthly newsletter, and help us grow into our 150 acres.

Donations are also most gratefully welcome at the receptacle near the entrance bridge. You can also return this guide here if you wish.
1 Welcome Sign
The Garden was established in 1989 for people of all ages to learn about plants in a beautiful setting. We focus on plants adapted to the dry summers of California and the world's other four Mediterranean climate regions. We encourage use of these beautiful and water-thrifty plants at home.

Our Preview Garden was opened in 1997. A plan for the 150-acre Garden is being implemented as funds permit.

2 Five Mediterranean Climate Regions
Gold tiles on the map show Mediterranean climates, first studied scientifically around the Mediterranean Sea. They occur between 30° and 45° in north and south latitudes with westerly winds from oceans in California, central Chile, the Capetown area of South Africa, parts of Western and South Australia, and lands around the Mediterranean Sea.

Sunny summers with no rain stress plants, but winters with mild temperatures and rain support growth and blooming. Plants have adapted to minimize water loss and store water for summer survival.

3 Chilean Region
The graceful mayten (Maytenus bouriana) with feathery foliage in Bed G is a drought-tolerant evergreen from canyons in central Chile’s coastal ranges. Shrubs near it belong to the Myrtle family, including Chilean guava (Ugni molinae), cultivated for its fruit to be eaten fresh or made into jelly. Calandrinia (Calandrinia spectabilis), from hot dry summer mountains, holds pink blooms from spring into fall well above its water-storing succulent leaves.

4 Mediterranean Region
Ethnobotany studies relationships between people and plants. Bed O contains plants from the Mediterranean region, one area where agriculture originated and a source of many food plants. These include artichoke (Cynara scolymus), fig (Ficus carica), and rosemary (Rosmarinus officinalis). Other plants help create beautiful landscapes, such as the purple smoke tree (Collinus coggygria "Purpureus"), oleander (Nerium oleander) and spurge (Euphorbia rigida).

5 South Africa Region
Plants in Bed N are mainly leaf succulents, storing water in leaves to outlast summer drought. Other succulents store water in stems or roots.

Aloes vary from under 2' to 60' tall. Cape aloe (Aloe ferox) reaches 20' with a rosette of thorn-edged leaves on a stalk and a candelabrum of orange to red flowers. Short leaf aloe (Aloe brevifolia) has basal leaf rosettes each 6" tall and to 12" wide, with unbranched stalks of red-orange flowers. Rosettes bud laterally to form clusters. Some aloes provide food, fibers, and medicine.

6 California Region
The California buckeye tree (Aesculus californica) in Bed M is summer deciduous, dropping its large leaves to reduce water loss. Chumash and Salinan people crushed and toasted its toxic fruit into ponds to temporarily stun fish for easy sustainable harvest. Many other California plants in Beds M, K, and L have small or needle-like leaves with hard coatings to minimize water loss. Examples are California lilac (Ceanothus spp.), Monterey pine (Pinus radiata), monkey flowers (Mimulus spp.) and manzanitas (Arctostaphylos spp.). Manzanita leaves parallel the sun’s rays to reduce heating.

7 Solar Energy Fountain
Cover the solar energy collector with the large leaf here. Water stops flowing in the fountain. This demonstrates the sun’s energy. Children learn that plants get energy from the sun, and people get energy by eating plants or meat from animals that ate plants.

California plants in Bed K reduce water loss with small leaves and white to light green colors which reflect solar heat away. See buckwheat (Eriogonum spp.), manzanita (Arctostaphylos spp.), and chalk lettuce (Dudleya pumila var.). Chalk lettuce also stores water in its succulent leaves.