

Botanical Tours



10. Parry Pinyon

Pinus quadrifolia

This small, drought-tolerant pine thrives in California's semiarid to arid foothills and mesas, offering dense evergreen foliage and a compact growth habit perfect for xeriscaping. The Parry pinyon produces edible pine nuts that attract wildlife, adding both texture and ecological value to native landscapes.

Fun Fact

Its cones can remain closed for years, opening only in response to intense heat from wildfires.



13. Toyon

Heteromeles arbutifolia

Toyon is a resilient evergreen shrub native to California's coastal regions. It features serrated, dark green leaves and vibrant red berries that appear in winter, attracting birds and wildlife.

Fun Fact

Toyon is sometimes called "California holly" because its bright red berries resemble traditional holly decorations.



11. Silver Cholla

Cylindropuntia echinocarpa

This striking cactus features branches with silvery spines that add unique texture to arid landscapes. The silver cholla thrives in drought-tolerant gardens, providing shelter and food for desert wildlife. In spring, it bursts into vibrant yellow blooms, enhancing its visual appeal.

Fun Fact

Its segments can detach and "jump" to passing wildlife or people, who move the segments to new areas, aiding in this cactus' survival.



14. White Sage

Salvia apiana

Native to Southern California's rugged terrain, white sage is a resilient, aromatic shrub with soft silver foliage. Known for its striking appearance and soothing scent, it thrives in sun-soaked, dry landscapes, creating a stunning contrast to its surroundings.

Fun Fact

Traditionally used by Indigenous peoples, the smoke from burning white sage is believed to cleanse spaces and foster purification.



12. Bigberry Manzanita

Arctostaphylos glauca

This evergreen shrub features large, gray-green leaves and striking reddish bark that adds color and texture to landscapes. The bigberry manzanita thrives in California's chaparral and provides valuable habitat for wildlife. In winter, it showcases clusters of delicate, pale pink flowers.

Fun Fact

Its bark peels in strips, revealing a fresh, smooth layer underneath.



15. Mountain Mahogany

Cercocarpus betuloides

The name *Cercocarpus* translates to "fruit with tail," a nod to the tree's distinctive twisted, hairy seeds. This hardy, drought-resistant tree thrives in California's rugged mountainous regions. Its evergreen, serrated leaves resemble those of birch, and its seeds are designed to travel far on the wind, enabling it to flourish in diverse landscapes.

Fun Fact

Indigenous peoples have historically utilized its strong, durable wood to create a range of essential tools.



California Nativescapes Garden



1. Englemann Oak
Quercus engelmannii

This rare Southern California oak thrives in hot, dry conditions, as its blue-green foliage and deep roots make it highly drought-tolerant. Nestled within San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance's Biodiversity Reserve is a native stand of majestic Englemann oaks, which play a vital role in supporting local wildlife by providing acorns for species like woodpeckers and scrub jays.

Fun Fact

These oaks can survive wildfires due to their thick, insulating bark and ability to regrow from their roots after fire damage.



4. Saguaro
Carnegiea gigantea

This iconic cactus, native to the Sonoran Desert, thrives in the hot, arid landscapes of southern Arizona and Sonora Mexico, with a few seen in southeastern California. The saguaro provides crucial shelter and food for desert wildlife and can live more than 150 years. It can weigh more than a ton when fully hydrated.

Fun Fact

With towering arms curving upward, this majestic cactus can grow more than 40 feet tall. Each arm takes approximately 50 to 70 years to develop.



7. White Coast Ceanothus
Ceanothus verrucosus

This elegant shrub found along Southern California's coastline displays a spectacular showing of delicate white blooms that stand out against its dark, glossy leaves. It prefers rocky, coastal habitats.

Fun Fact

This resilient plant has adapted to wildfire-prone areas, regenerating from its roots after fires to restore its place in the landscape.



2. Del Mar Manzanita
Arctostaphylos glandulosa ssp. crassifolia

This rare subspecies of manzanita is native to the rugged landscapes of southern San Diego County and northern Baja California, where it thrives on rocky outcrops, slopes, and ridges. Its striking features include thick, leathery evergreen leaves; smooth red bark; and delicate urn-shaped flowers that bloom in shades of white and pink.

Fun Fact

These charming flowers provide a vital nectar source for pollinators, like bees and hummingbirds, and play a key role in supporting local biodiversity.



5. Matilija Poppy
Romneya coulteri

Often called the "fried egg plant," this wildflower's blooms, which appear in late spring, measure five to seven inches wide—the largest of any California native plant. Its delicate petals, with their distinctive crinkled texture, resemble fine crepe paper, adding to its regal charm. Among some native plant admirers, it's known as the "Queen of California."

Fun Fact

To germinate, the seeds require the flash heat of a wildfire. Once established, it spreads quickly through underground rhizomes, creating a striking display.



8. Nuttall's Scrub Oak
Quercus dumosa

This is one of California's rarest oak species and one of the six species in San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance's oak conservation program. Thriving in sandy soils and canyons near the ocean, it offers essential habitat for wildlife, with its dense foliage providing nesting sites and shelter. Its small, cupped evergreen leaves with sharply toothed edges and its multitrunked, shrub-like form contribute to its unique beauty.

Fun Fact

With an extensive deep root system, this oak is highly drought-resistant, allowing it to thrive in challenging conditions.



3. California Fan Palm
Washingtonia filifera

This is a majestic, tall palm tree native to the desert oases of California. Characterized by its fan-shaped fronds and sturdy trunk, it thrives in full sun and is highly drought-tolerant. The palm produces creamy white flower clusters and small, black, berry-like fruits that provide food for wildlife.

Fun Fact

This palm is California's only native palm species and can live for more than 100 years!



6. Beavertail Prickly Pear
Opuntia basilaris

Low-growing and unique among prickly pears, this cactus is notable for its absence of long spines. Its gray-blue pads feature tiny, barbed bristles, and in spring, brilliant magenta blooms provide a striking contrast. A true gem of arid landscapes, the beavertail prickly pear is as resilient as it is beautiful.

Fun Fact

Don't be fooled—the bristles, or glochids, are barbed, sharp, irritating, and difficult to remove!



9. California Buckwheat
Eriogonum fasciculatum

Hardy and highly adaptable, this plant is a dominant species in coastal sage scrub habitats, playing a vital role in supporting a wide range of pollinators. Its dense clusters of flowers offer a plentiful nectar source. The colors range from pure white to white striped with soft pink hues and deepen into a rich, warm rust color during winter.

Fun Fact

Indigenous peoples, such as the Kumeyaay, used this plant for its medicinal properties, brewing its leaves and flowers into teas to treat headaches and digestive issues.