

SUFA ENews Winter 2021



Welcome to the Winter 2021 issue of the Sunnyvale Urban Forest Advocates (SUFA) newsletter. This quarterly newsletter will keep you informed about how you can participate in SUFA's efforts to increase the tree canopy in Sunnyvale through education, tree plantings, and advocacy.

Tree on the Street Interview

In our November 2020 newsletter we introduced a new series featuring common Sunnyvale street trees with information about the trees presented in an interview format. These are trees you'll see as you walk or bike through Sunnyvale neighborhoods or parks. Last time we spoke with a gingko. This time we're talking with a true California native – the coast live oak.

SUFA: Thank you for being willing to be interviewed by Sunnyvale Urban Forest Advocates. First, can I get your full name?

CLO: Sure. I'm *Quercus agrifolia*. That's Latin and tricky to pronounce, so you can just call me coast live oak.

SUFA: You're a bit of a California icon are you not?

CLO: Oh, you bet! Coast live oaks are proud California natives – going back 20 million years, give or take. We're found from Mendocino County to northern Baja California. Cities such as Oakland and Thousand Oaks are named after us. The Spanish settlers in California called us *encina* and, this is interesting - the City of Sunnyvale originally wanted to be called either Murphy or Encinal (oak grove) and Sunnyvale's first grammar school was named Encina, so we are proud Sunnyvale natives also. So, indeed, we are quite iconic but sadly, not iconic enough to be the California state tree apparently. It's okay. I'm not bitter. Except for my acorns.

SUFA: And you have quite a history with the inhabitants of California, is that right?

CLO: Uh-huh, for example, the prolific numbers of acorns we produce provided food for over twelve indigenous California cultures. The Spanish used our wood to make charcoal to burn in their kilns when they made adobe. Later settlers made farm tools and wagon wheels from us and shipbuilders used our gnarly and twisted branches to make specialized joints.

SUFA: In addition to being so iconic you are, much more importantly, a keystone species (a keystone species is one which has an extremely high impact on a particular ecosystem relative to its population).

CLO: So true! I am proud to say that coast live oak trees can be home to over 300 different species of mammals, plants, birds, and insects – not all at the same time, of course. That would be very noisy and itchy. But, yes, we are quite exceptional as a host to both native and migratory wildlife.

SUFA: It's still very much winter and yet I see that, unlike many other Sunnyvale street trees, you still have your leaves.

CLO: Indeed. We are not winter deciduous but do drop our old leaves in the spring just as our new leaves are budding out. Some of us lose our leaves all at once, some slowly. What we drop in the fall are our acorns. You're welcome birds and squirrels. And you know the old proverb – "Mighty oaks from little acorns grow." That's us.

SUFA: So much of your habitat has been destroyed as California has grown in population, but now you are making a resurgence as an urban street tree. Tell us, what makes coast live oaks such good street trees?

CLO: Well, ahem... not to brag but we sequester more carbon and absorb more storm runoff than many other street trees. We're longtime California natives so, of course, that makes us drought resistant. As I mentioned before, we are home to a tremendous amount of native wildlife and lastly, our canopy can get up to 70 feet wide which creates a lot of shade and cooling for you tiny folks down there sweltering on the cement and asphalt.

SUFA: Well, thank you so much for your time and for sharing such great information with us. May I take a couple of acorns as a souvenir?

CLO: Sure thing. I've got a million of 'em.



Additional Resources

For a great article on the loss of oak trees in Silicon Valley and efforts to restore them: <https://baynature.org/article/a-street-tree-revolution-in-silicon-valley/>

For information on the effects of climate change on California oaks and many other articles about oaks visit: oaktopia.org

To learn how you can help with efforts to re-oak California, see the article below or go to: <https://www.cnps.org/give/priority-initiatives/re-oak-california>



The California Native Plant Society (CNPS) aims to build on the enthusiasm Californians showed in the 2017 Re-Oak Wine Country effort with a new initiative -- Re-Oak California. When CNPS launched the Re-Oak Wine Country after the fall 2017 wildfires, thousands of Californians responded, collecting and sending in acorns from coast live oaks, valley oaks, black oaks, and other native species of *Quercus*. CNPS volunteers and staff sorted, cleaned, and prepared the acorns for propagation. Thanks to those efforts the acorns collected in 2017 are now seedlings on their way to becoming valuable habitat and climate-change fighters.

Oak wildlands in California are now a fraction of what once existed. In the past 70 years, more than 1 million acres of oak habitat have been lost to development, disease, and habitat decimation, including wildfires.

People interested in helping to restore oaks to more of California can sign up at www.cnps.org/give/priority-initiatives/re-oak-california for instructions and information on ongoing events.



Exposure to nature has been shown to improve mental health and well being. While working in the garden, visiting a local park, and walking through a meadow can expose us to nature, studies have shown that interacting with trees has the greatest impact. The variety of colors, shapes, sizes, and textures found in trees help engage the senses in a way that other environments cannot match.

Spending time around trees can help reduce blood pressure and improve mood, two benefits that are particularly important during this time of social distancing. Urban forests and street trees can provide a social benefit by linking neighborhoods and providing a common experience, effectively bringing us together and reducing loneliness while letting us remain at a physical distance.

Hopefully, some of these trees are right outside your door. Taking breaks throughout the day by walking through the neighborhood can help relieve stress, help connect us to the greater world, and can improve concentration and creativity.

While walking, take time to notice the changes happening to the trees around you. Are new leaves emerging? What shape and color are the leaves? Are acorns falling? Are birds more active? What about the squirrels? Are there blossoms? Is there fruit? Are there other observations you can make?

A simple walk around the block is immensely beneficial. Take a break. Take a walk.



Many people wonder "What is that tree with the beautiful white blossoms that blooms in late winter/early spring?" This beautiful tree is the callery pear (*Pyrus calleryana*) and is native to China and Vietnam.

In the eastern and mid-western part of the United States it is considered extremely invasive because the many seeds it produces are easily spread by wind, birds, and animals.

However, the callery pear is used as a street tree in Sunnyvale and produces an abundance of small, white five-petal flowers that erupt before the leaves are fully expanded. During a heavy spring wind, the petals sometimes fall in such profusion that it can give the illusion of snow - brightening otherwise dreary end-of-winter days.

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