

CALIFORNIA NATIVES TOLERANT OF CLAY SOIL

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ESSENTIAL ANALYSIS AND CARE

Clay Soil is a challenge for several reasons:

- Water runs off
- Plants need to be suited to the soil
- Clay runs in veins, mixed in with other soil types

Analyze your soil. Clay may run in sections 20 to 100 feet wide. Color is often an indicator of clay soil. Deep red, or a buff color may be indicators.

If you notice that water runs off this section more rapidly than other areas, this is also an indicator of clay. Select a sample and wet it thoroughly. Does it ball up? That is a characteristic of clay.

In dry climates, clay becomes very hard, and almost impossible to dig. It may crumble into hard, sharp segments.

Test your soil. Agricultural analysis may help. Remember to take multiple samples since soil microclimates abound in a garden of any size.



California Native Plant Society - San Diego Chapter

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Limited areas of clay can be treated with a solution available at nurseries to break up the clay, which could then be amended with some decomposed granite to ensure drainage.

If you are in a new subdivision, the topsoil may have been scraped. This is a more complicated situation, and may require professional help.

The plants listed below are good choices for clay soils.

TREES

- Acer macrophyllum* (Big Leaf Maple)
- Alnus rhombifolia* (White Alder)
- Calocedrus decurrens* (Incense Cedar)
- Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* (Lawson's Cypress)
- Cupressus forbesii* (Tecate Cypress)
- Lyonothamnus floribundus ssp. aspleuifolius*
(Fern-leaved Catalina Ironwood)*
- Myrica californica* (Pacific Wax Myrtle)*
- Pinus attenuata* (Knobcone Pine)
- Pinus coulteri* (Coulter Pine)
- Pinus radiata* (Monterey Pine)
- Pinus sabiniana* (Foothill Pine)
- Pinus torreyana* (Torrey Pine)
- Populus balsamifera ssp. trichocarpa*
(Black Cottonwood)
- Prunus ilicifolia ssp. lyonii* (Catalina Cherry)*
- Pseudotsuga menziesii* (Douglas Fir)*
- Quercus agrifolia* (Coast Live Oak)

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Quercus chrysolepis (Canyon Live Oak)
Quercus lobata (Valley Oak)
Sequoia sempervirens (Coast Redwood)*
Sequoiadendron giganteum (Giant Sequoia)
Washingtonia filifera (California Fan Palm)

SHRUBS

Adenostoma fasciculatum (Chamise)
Adenostoma sparsifolium (Redshanks)
Arctostaphylos edmundsii (Manzanita)*
Arctostaphylos glauca (Big Berry Manzanita)*
Arctostaphylos hookeri (Monterey Manzanita)*
Arctostaphylos franciscana (Manzanita)*
Arctostaphylos pajaroensis (Pajaro Manzanita)*
Arctostaphylos viscida (Manzanita)*
Baccharis pilularis 'Twin Peaks' or 'Pigeon Point'
(Chaparral Broom, Coyote Bush)
Calycanthus occidentalis (Spice Bush)*
Carpenteria californica (Bush Anemone)*
Ceanothus 'Concha'*
*Ceanothus gloriosus**
*Ceanothus griseus**
Ceanothus griseus horizontalis *
Ceanothus maritimus (Maritime Ceanothus)*
Ceanothus megacarpus (Big Pod Ceanothus)*
Ceanothus spinosus (Greenbark Ceanothus)*
Cercis occidentalis (Western Redbud)
Cercocarpus betuloides (Western Mountain Mahogany)
Chilopsis linearis (Desert Willow)
Comarostaphylis diversifolia (Summer Holly)*
Coreopsis gigantea (Giant Coreopsis)*
Dendromecon harfordii (Channel Island Bush Poppy)*
Dendromecon rigida (Bush Poppy)*
Encelia californica (Coast Sunflower)*
Eriogonum arborescens (Santa Cruz Is. Buckwheat)*
Eriogonum fasciculatum (California Buckwheat)*
Eriogonum giganteum (St. Catherine's Lace)*
Forestiera neomexicana (Desert Olive)
Fraxinus dipetela (Flowering Ash)
Galvezia speciosa (Island Snapdragon)*
Garrya elliptica (Coast Tasselbush)*
Heteromeles arbutifolia (Toyon, Christmas Berry)*

* These species need good drainage