

TECHNICAL ELEMENTS



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REPLACING ICE PLANT

Years ago, Freeway iceplant (*Carpobrotus edulis*) was touted as the perfect solution for fire safety. Planted on hillsides of thousands of homes in San Diego, it has since crawled off the original site and into neighboring Open Space parks, endangering unique plants by smothering them. Iceplant provides little habitat value compared to the plant community that it is replacing. Compared to the native shrubs, Iceplant has very shallow roots that do not hold soil well; close inspection often reveals gullies underneath the twisted mat of vines. After rain, Iceplant engorges with water, substantially increasing its weight. As a result, Iceplant can cause the deterioration of steep hillsides by encouraging slumping – potentially endangering the house above.

PROCEDURE:

First, remove the iceplant. Then add native container plants, leaving the dead iceplant to act as mulch while the container plants become established. Keep an eye out for volunteers of native plants, which may return once the iceplant is removed.

1. REMOVE THE ICEPLANT:

Because of its shallow roots, iceplant can be easily pulled, piled up and left to dry out (which will take several months).

If erosion on a steep hillside is a concern, iceplant can be killed in place by spraying with 2% (final concentration) of Roundup. Choose a low-wind day. Check the label for precise directions on use. The active ingredient, glyphosate, is essentially non-toxic

to humans and other animals – its target is an enzyme specific to plants; it does not bioaccumulate and it breaks down over time. It binds tightly to soil particles and is therefore unlikely to wash from the site. Roundup will not kill seeds, but it will kill desirable plants, which may be covered while one sprays. It will take several weeks for sprayed plants to start yellowing. A good schedule to follow is: treat in the spring or summer, then plant or sow seed in the late fall.

2. PLANT CONTAINER PLANTS

First, decide what plants are appropriate, figure out where to get them, and then plant them.

PLANT CHOICE

First, there may be a viable native seed bank, so keep an eye out for volunteers of native plants, which will return once the shade by the Iceplant is removed. Next, choose plants based on the habitat type that originally existed on your hillside. If possible, find a nearby area with native vegetation, and study the slopes that have the orientation as yours (for example, south-facing or north-facing). The native plants growing there are the ones that will be successful on your hillside with the least maintenance.

The plants in the table below are chosen because they are easy to grow plants, are distributed widely on hillsides around San Diego, and are consistent with easy fire-zone management, because their foliage resists ignition, or they can be pruned easily to reduce fire risk. Many other native plants fit these criteria.



CNPS Gardening Committee

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APPROPRIATE PLANTS

TREES OR TREE-LIKE SHRUBS

Heteromeles arbutifolia Toyon

Quercus dumosa Scrub Oak

Quercus agrifolia Coast Live Oak

Quercus engelmannii Engelmann Oak

Rhus integrifolia Lemonadeberry - use sparingly, plants become quite large.

BROAD-LEAF SHRUBS

Ceanothus sp. California Lilac

Isomeris arborea Bladderpod

Lonicera subspicata Chaparral Honeysuckle

Malosma laurina Laurel Sumac

Prunus illicifolia ssp. *illicifolia* Hollyleaf Cherry

Rhamnus californica Coffeeberry

Rhamnus crocea Redberry

Ribes speciosum Fuchsia-flowered Gooseberry

Simmondsia chinensis Jojoba

GROUNDCOVERS

Sisyrinchium bellum Blue-eyed Grass (a perennial bulb that spreads)

Artemisia douglasiana Douglas' Sage

Epilobium (formerly *Zauschneria*) California Fuchsia

Eriogonum spp. Buckwheat

Solidago californica California Goldenrod

Iva hayesiana Iva

SUCCULENTS, CACTUS, YUCCA

These can be easily propagated without irrigation, and they provide substantial habitat benefits. There are a number of species - find the one that is native to your area.

Cylindropuntia sp. Cholla species (e.g. *Opuntia prolifera*)

Cylindropuntia sp. Prickly-pear species (e.g. *Opuntia littoralis*)

Dudleya sp. Dudleya species (e.g. *Dudleya pulverulenta*)

Yucca schidigera Mojave Yucca