

LIVING AMONG OAKS?

HOW TO RESTORE LOS ANGELES COUNTY OAK WOODLANDS BY STARTING IN YOUR OWN BACKYARD

Dear Homeowner,

We need your help! The mountains, foothills, and valleys of Los Angeles County were once the site of majestic oak woodlands. These oak woodlands are the ancestral homelands of Indigenous Peoples who continue to steward oak woodlands through cultural practices. This pamphlet provides information to residents who are new to appreciating or to living among oaks: what benefits oak woodlands provide to both human and non-human communities, why oak woodlands are important to Los Angeles County's natural heritage, and how you can protect, restore, and preserve these amazing trees in the residential landscape.



Circa 1870 landscape painting by Hermann Herzog of oak trees in a valley near Los Angeles. Courtesy of the Robert B. Honeyman, Jr. Collection of Early Californian and Western American Pictorial Material. Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

The Los Angeles County General Plan, which guides future development in the County, sets a policy to ensure no net loss of existing oak and native woodlands. Oaks face many threats including drought, climate change, and development pressures. To help achieve this goal of conserving and perpetuating oak woodlands, homeowners can contribute by preserving existing oak trees while protecting and planting new oak seedlings, which will be the oak woodlands of the future.



Photo credit: Rosi Dagit



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Every spring, oak seedlings sprout in many backyards, planted by squirrels, scrub jays, woodpeckers, and other wildlife. Homeowners can contribute to the Los Angeles County goal of no net loss by taking some simple steps :

- » Re-design building projects to preserve existing oaks
- » Allow oak seedlings to grow under and around oaks
- » Integrate oaks into drought-tolerant landscape designs
- » Locate structures, driveways, and paths away from existing oaks to minimize ground disturbance near roots
- » Utilize mulch to protect soil moisture around oak seedlings and saplings
- » Protect oak seedlings from wildlife with tree tubes, milk cartons, and above- and below-ground wire fencing to prevent them from being eaten



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As your oak seedling matures you will see a greater variety of birds, insects, and other wildlife appear in your backyard. Oak trees provide an outsized contribution to the local ecosystem where they grow. They provide food and shelter to thousands of species of plants, wildlife, and insects. They improve the air we breathe and the quality of water we drink. They hold water in our watersheds to keep the soil from drying out, recharge groundwater, help to stabilize soil and prevent erosion, lower the air and soil temperature, and provide cooling shade, while enhancing views and property values. In addition, some species of oak have fire-resistant qualities and when maintained following guidelines from Los Angeles County Fire and Planning, may block embers from igniting structures.



Photo credit: Ros Darr

To slow climate change, greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced. Oak trees have dense wood which can capture or "sequester" more carbon than many other types of trees. Oak trees can also live for centuries, sequestering carbon for centuries. When mature oak trees are cut down, the carbon that was stored in the trees and soil will begin to release back into the atmosphere, contributing again to climate change. This is another reason why preserving mature oak trees is just as important as protecting and planting new ones.

Oak trees are regulated in Los Angeles County. One way to save time and avoid fees is to integrate oak trees into your project design and avoid removing any oak trees. To encroach upon or cut down an oak tree, an oak tree permit is required. The permitting process will include a counseling session with a planner to help locate and design the project to prevent or minimize impacts to oak trees. Issuance of oak tree permits is not automatic and may include a public hearing for any impact to oak trees. Mitigation may include planting more oak trees to offset oak tree impacts and/or removals that are permitted. Mitigation may also include an appraisal of the value of the oak tree and payment of this amount into an oak conservation fund to ensure no net loss of Los Angeles County oak woodlands.

Preserving and restoring Los Angeles County oak woodlands can begin in your own backyard. By preserving existing oak trees, and protecting and planting new oak seedlings, you can become an OAK TREE STEWARD today!

To learn more about the importance and benefits of oak trees, and Los Angeles County's oak tree protections, including regulations in the Santa Monica Mountains Local Coastal Program and the Santa Monica Mountains North Area Plan, contact us:

WILDLIFE THAT RELY ON OAK HABITAT



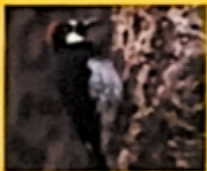
California Sister (*Adelpha californica*)

Photo credit: © 2007 Ron Wolf. All Rights Reserved



Western Tiger Swallowtail (*Papilio rutulus*)

Photo credit: © 2011 Christopher L. Christie



Acorn Woodpecker (*Melanerpes formicivorus*)

Photo credit: Hayley Crews



Gold Hunter's Hairstreak (*Satyrium auretorum*)

Photo credit: © Chris Mallory



California Scrub Jay (*Aphelocoma californica*)

Photo credit: Chris Orr / Great Backyard Bird Count



Nuttall's Woodpecker (*Picoides nuttallii*)

Photo credit: Mick Thompson

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Canyon Live Oak
Quercus chrysolepis

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Valley Oak
Quercus lobata

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Coast Live Oak
Quercus agrifolia

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Black Oak
Quercus kelloggii

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Oak Tree Ordinance FAQs

The Oak Tree Ordinance was established to recognize oak trees as significant historical, aesthetic, and ecological resources, and as one of the most picturesque trees in Los Angeles County. Oak trees lend beauty and charm to the natural and manmade landscape, enhancing the value of property, and the character of the communities in which they exist.

The objective of the Oak Tree Ordinance is to preserve and maintain healthy oak trees in the development process. To achieve this objective, an Oak Tree Permit is required for any proposed development that will involve pruning larger branches and roots, encroachment within the protected zone, and removal of protected oak trees.

What Trees are Protected?

Any oak tree (genus *Quercus*) with a single trunk measuring 8" or more in diameter, as measured 4.5' above natural grade (DSH) is protected. If an oak tree has more than one trunk, the combined diameter of any two oak trunks measuring 12" or more in diameter (DSH) is protected.

The ordinance applies to all unincorporated communities of Los Angeles County except for regions with more protective tree regulations such as the Santa Monica Mountains Coastal Zone and North Area.

What is an Oak Tree Permit?

An Oak Tree Permit from LA County Planning allows pruning, encroachment, and removal of protected oak trees when avoiding impacts to them is demonstrated to be infeasible.

When Can Protected Oak Trees be Pruned without an Oak Tree Permit?

Pruning oak tree branches and roots up to 2" in diameter can occur, when necessary, without obtaining an Oak Tree Permit.

When Can Protected Oak Trees be Removed without an Oak Tree Permit?

If a protected oak tree appears to be a hazard or is sick, notify the LA County Fire Department's Forestry Division at (818) 890-5719. A Forester will assess the tree and recommend pruning for tree health or removal. Emergency exemptions expire in 90 days.

Why is the Ordinance Being Updated Now?

The LA County Oak Tree Ordinance was adopted in 1982. To ensure the objective of the ordinance is still being met, LA County Planning is initiating an update.

To participate in the update, sign up for updates: bit.ly/oaktree-newsletter. And take the oak tree survey: bit.ly/oaktreesurvey.

What is the Protected Zone?

The area within the dripline plus five feet, or the area 15' from the surface of the trunk, whichever distance is greater, including a combination of the two. See Figures below.

FIG. 1: PROTECTED ZONE (PLAN VIEW)

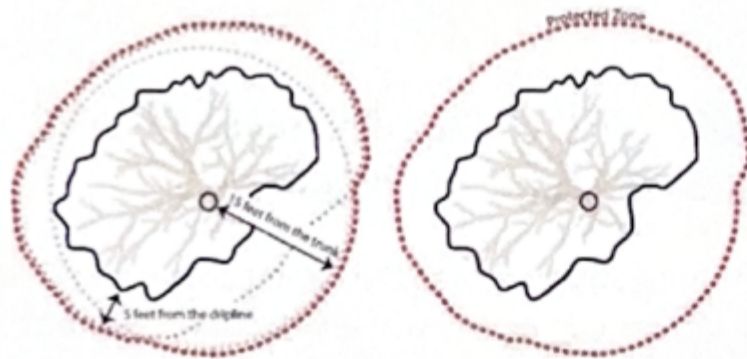
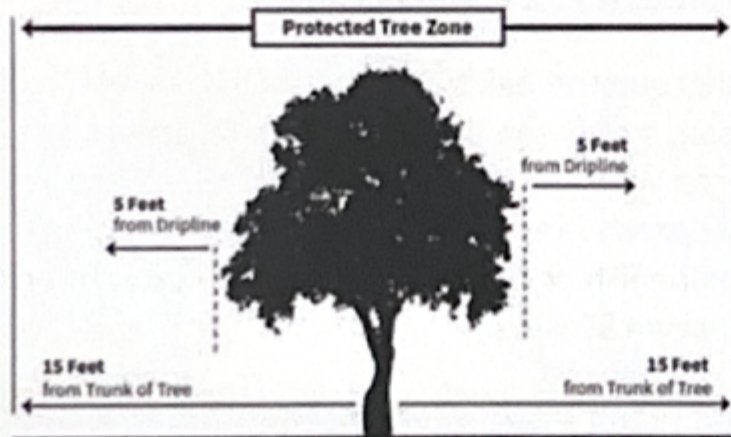


FIG. 2: PROTECTED ZONE (ELEVATION VIEW)



What Counts as an "Impact"?

Pruning branches and roots over 2" in diameter, trenching or compacting soil in the protected zone, and removing a protected oak tree are considered impacts. Driving and storing heavy materials within the protected zone can compact the soil, suffocating roots.

What about Heritage Oak Trees?

Heritage oak trees have a trunk measuring 36" or more, at 4.5' above the natural grade. All impacts to heritage oak trees require an Oak Tree Permit with a public hearing.

What Does the Oak Tree Permitting Process Entail?

Depending on the degree of impact to protected oak trees from the proposed project, the oak tree permitting process may include an oak tree report, fees, site visits from LA County Planning and Forestry, planting replacement trees, payment into an oak conservation fund, and a public hearing.

Can I Get Help When Planning a Project on a Property with Oak Trees?

LA County Planning offers pre-application counseling to help locate and redesign projects to avoid or minimize impacts to oak trees. **No oak tree impacts = no Oak Tree Permit!** For help with permitting under the existing Oak Tree Ordinance, contact LA County Planning: (213) 974-6411 or info@planning.lacounty.gov. A planner will help you through the permitting process.

Info about Value & Importance of Oaks

LA County Planning offers an informational pamphlet about the value and importance of oak trees, available on the Oak Tree Program website (under Documents): bit.ly/oaktreeprogram

Take the Survey!
Stay in touch!
bit.ly/oaktree-newsletter
oaktree@planning.lacounty.gov



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