

TREES OF HILLSIDE NATURAL AREA EL CERRITO, CA

More than half of Hillside Natural Area is covered by a canopy of trees, with at least 25 different species. These forests and woodlands contain important wildlife habitat, reduce erosion, and improve air quality. A recent study estimates that these trees provide over \$26,000/year in air pollution reduction benefits. They also provide a shady respite for people like you who come out to enjoy this urban oasis!

Coast live oak is the predominant tree in Hillside Natural Area, with nearly 1/3 of the total tree canopy, followed by eucalyptus, willow, and toyon. Other important trees include California buckeye, blue elderberry, hazelnut, and bay. As you walk along Hillside's undulating contours, notice that most of the forest and woodlands are on north slopes and in protected canyons that stay cool and moist.

Blue gum eucalyptus (post #1) is an Australian tree that was planted here during the quarry days to help stabilize the hillsides. It has long, narrow leaves that are tough and evergreen, and bark that sheds in long strips. Watch out for its hard, top-shaped seed pods, which can be slippery.



Coast live oak is aptly named, being the only oak that grows directly on the coast of California. They are one of the most important tree species for wildlife, prized for their acorns. The gnarled, twisting trunks create their unique, spreading canopies. Their evergreen leaves are thick, waxy, and spiked- helping to conserve water through our dry summers and making them less palatable to insects and deer.

Arroyo willow is a small tree found along creeks and seeps where its roots can touch water. This tree provides food and shade to the many critters that live in and along our creeks. It is also loved by songbirds, which cluster in its branches at dawn and dusk. Its leaves are much thinner and softer than eucalyptus, though similar in shape. **Arroyo willow** leaves are dark-green on the upper surface, and whitish-green on the underside.



Arroyo Willow

Redwood



You'll find a few **redwood** trees in the shaded canyon near the creek at post #5. **Redwood** only grows in the fog belt along our coast, and is actually known to be a fog collector. Its needles and twigs are shaped so that water drops form on them. These drops are guided to branch tips, where they drip to the ground to be can be taken up by the roots.

Keep an eye out also for **blue elderberry** while you're near post #5. Their pale yellow springtime flowers are clustered at the end of branches. They give way to small blue berries in late summer and fall that can be used to make wines, syrups, and jams.



Blue Elderberry

At post #11 you'll find two California natives growing together- a **hazelnut** and a **bay** tree. The deciduous **hazelnut** has hairy, zig-zag twigs and leaves with teeth on the margins. The evergreen **bay** tree has smooth, straight twigs and long, narrow leaves. **Hazelnuts** have historically been an important food resource for people and wildlife, while **bay** leaves are an important cooking spice.

The Memorial Grove at the Schmidt Lane entrance contains four pine species, redwood, and cypress. Note the large yellow flowers of the California flannel-bush near Schmidt Lane, a drought-tolerant native.

Help us steward the important and dynamic forests and woodlands of the Hillside Natural Area so future generations can appreciate and enjoy them as much as we do today! Visit el-cerrito.org and look for the **Tree Committee** and/or the **Environmental Quality Committee**. Or join volunteer organizations like **Friends of Five Creeks** and **El Cerrito Trail Trekkers** that help maintain and improve this open space.

Trees of the Memorial Grove:

- Allepo pine**
- Coulter pine**
- Canary Island pine**
- Monterey pine**
- California flannel-bush**
- Redwood**
- Monterey Cypress**