



## How We Fared in the Flood

Greetings, friends of [Mama Tree](#). Many have asked how our orchard fared in the recent flood (January 2023). More than 13" of rain landed on fully saturated soils. We're delighted to say our preparations for a major water event paid off and we're excited to share ideas about what worked and what we're still learning. Also, we're [hosting a pruning workshop](#) on Saturday, February 18th - please join us!

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## Our Story in a Walnutshell

Mama Tree is a family-owned orchard, situated on 60 acres on the Sulfur Mountain side of the Upper Ojai Valley, directly across from the newly minted Topa Institute (formerly known as The Ojai Foundation).

We're transitioning a once-conventional orchard (citrus, olives, and walnuts) into a diverse, regenerative agro-ecological system that relies on permaculture design\*.

\*For a glossary of terms, [CLICK HERE](#).

To unpack that jargon, we simply (though it's not so simple) take a daily, practical approach to mimicking nature as best we can. This means encouraging a diversity of plants, keeping soil covered, integrating grazing animals, choosing water wise and climate appropriate crops, and capturing rainfall to recharge the groundwater ("planting the rain"). We encourage nature to do her thing. For example, we installed raptor perches in the orchard to control the ground squirrel population. A permaculturist might say, "You don't have a squirrel problem, you have a raptor shortage."

We hope to uncover the many layers of our approach and highlight some of our practices in future newsletters. For now, we want to dive into how we capture rainfall, or in other words, how we avoided significant flood damage while recharging our groundwater and fertilizing our orchard.

Prior to becoming Mama Tree, the landscape was designed to shed water as efficiently as possible. Concrete diversions shuttled rainwater off the land into the nearby Lion Canyon Creek, which feeds the Ventura River.

When the land changed stewardship in 2019, Ojai-based permaculturist Connor Jones installed several on-contour\* berms and infiltration basins throughout a block of the Pixie orchard. Building on this foundation, the current co-farm manager, Jeffrey Reidl, installed additional berms, swales, and basins to slow the rainwater runoff.



*Mama Tree working with Grounded Landworks on a major earthworks installation in spring 2021: a swale, berm, and infiltration basin*



This way of working with (and softly guiding) the flow of nature allowed us to collect a significant amount of nutrient-rich topsoil running off from the woodland without significant erosion. This was especially true during the most recent historic storm and downpour from the "atmospheric river". For us, this was feedback that our designs are functional and applied at the correct scale.

Dive deeper into our flood story in Jeffrey's article "[Agroecosystem Resilience in the Midst of Extremes](#)".





And watch Jeffrey explain [here](#) how our unfinished swales held up during the historic storm.

## Olive Pruning Workshop

Mama Tree is offering our first public pruning workshop on Saturday February 18th. This workshop will cover the basics of pruning, tool maintenance, and specifics of olive tree care.

Our instructors will be providing an in-depth look into tree structure and shape to best understand how to make the right cut and why. There will be a break after the educational portion and a vegan lunch will be provided for the attendees. We'll then follow up with hands-on training in which each participant will be able to practice pruning on an olive tree.

For more information and to register, click the button below:



[Register](#)



Find Mama Tree at the Ojai Community Farmers Market every Thursday from 3 to 7pm. We are grateful to be a part of the local network of farmers there, to connect with you, and to share the story behind the products we created with ingredients grown from Mama Tree soil.

We hope to continue sending out quarterly newsletters.



Header photo and Walnut photo by Kate Bowen at Light Beacon Photography



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