



PLANTS

A resilient landscape is fire-wise, water wise and promotes biodiversity by using California native plants. These gardens use sustainable practices, plant selection, and maintenance to reduce the risk of fire in the defensible space zone. Resilient gardens save water, protect us from fire and promote biodiversity.

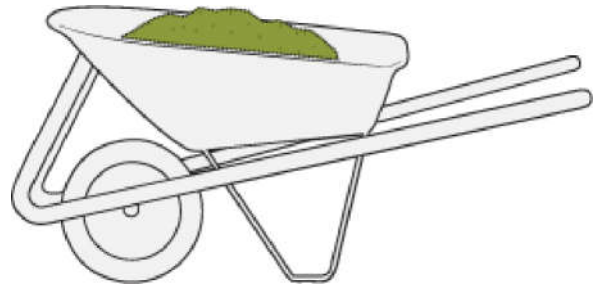
PLANT SELECTION	WATER & IRRIGATION	NATIVE PLANTS & COMMUNITIES	INVASIVE SPECIES	IMPORTANCE OF OAK WOODLAND	P MANA
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Mulch



Mulching with wood chips, photo by Jon Kanagy

Mulch is any material used to cover the soil, and offers many benefits in a landscape. It can:



- Reduce the occurrence of weeds
- Reduce evaporation of water from the soil, leaving more for plants
- Keep soil temperatures cooler, which is important for plant roots and beneficial soil organisms including earthworms
- Help control soil erosion from rainfall and wind
- Prevent soil compaction, allowing more air to enter the soil for healthy plants and soil life
- Slowly decompose and contribute valuable organic matter to the soil, if a plant-based mulch is chosen
- Visually enhance the landscape

Using mulch in a firewise landscape

Adjacent to homes and other structures, in a zone 0-5' from the walls, only inorganic mulch such as gravel and rock are recommended. In a zone 5-30' from homes and other structures, plant-based mulches such as wood chips and bark may be used to a depth not more than 2-3". Since all plant-based mulches are combustible, they should not be used in a widespread or continuous manner. Islands of plants can have wood mulch underneath, but the groupings of plants should be separated by some pathways or other features that utilize non-combustible materials. Note that larger sizes of gravel and rock do not allow weeding tools to be used, thus reducing the options for weed control to hand pulling (or herbicides). Wherever organic mulch is used, it should be kept a few inches away from the bases of taller shrubs and trees.

Leaf litter provides a valuable free mulch that is highly beneficial to plants and soil. As leaf litter can be flammable, it should be kept to 1" or less in Zone 1 in the dry season, but allowed to accumulate to enrich the soil in winter. In zone 2, it may

remain year 'round but not allowed to accumulate to more than a few inches. It's important to continually remove any leaf litter or other debris within 5' of the structure.

Weed barrier fabric and plastic

Weed fabric and plastic sheeting are also types of mulch typically used under gravel and bark. They do, however, have many disadvantages and are not recommended. Before long, weed seeds begin to germinate in the mulch on top of the barrier, and their roots will tear it when pulled. Loose fabric and plastic is an eyesore and difficult to bury once it becomes exposed. Most importantly, weed barrier fabrics and plastic exclude earthworm and microorganism activity, leading to dead, compacted soils. A weed barrier that may have a place in the weed management arsenal is cardboard. Cardboard sheets, especially when used in the late fall or winter and covered with 2-3" of wood chips, will provide great weed control and the cardboard will be largely decomposed by the following summer. This technique is called sheet mulching and is also a great way to convert a lawn into a new, native landscape.

We appreciate the contributors to this section:

[California Flora Nursery](#)

[alscape.org](#)

Sources:

[C Master Gardener Program of Sonoma County, California Natives](#)

[arin Chapter, California Native Plant Society Plant Replacement List](#)

[California Flora Nursery](#)

[alscape](#) a native plant database from the California Native Plant Society



Sonoma Ecology Center works to address challenges related to water supply and quality, open space, rural character, biodiversity, energy, climate change, and a better quality of life for all residents.

<https://sonomaecologycenter.org/>



The UC Master Gardener Program of Sonoma County has been extending educational outreach and providing technical assistance to home gardeners since 1981.

<https://sonomamg.ucanr.edu/>



The mission of the Habitat Corridor Project is to create and promote California native plant restoration gardens in the urban environment.

<http://habitatcorridorproject.org/>



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