

PLANTS OF THE CHANNEL ISLANDS OF CALIFORNIA

A LOOK AT THE UNIQUE ATTRIBUTES OF THE EIGHT ISLANDS OFF THE COAST OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

California's eight Channel Islands include Santa Catalina (the best known), San Clemente, San Miguel, Santa Cruz, and Santa Rosa islands

- The northern group of four islands are mostly part of Channel Islands National Park and lie from 15 to 35 miles off the coast near Santa Barbara and Ventura
- The largest of these four, and in fact of all eight islands, is Santa Cruz, which comprises almost 100 square miles, has the greatest diversity of terrain and geology, and the best array of plant communities
- The islands are noted for their mild, year-round climate and isolation from the mainland, making them laboratories of evolutionary experiment

Many of the Channel Islands plants are endemic, some because they represent relicts from the past, others as new species isolated from their mainland counterparts

- Many of these island endemics represent unusually large-flowered, or plants large in size because of the milder climate
- As a result, many Channel Island endemics make excellent choices for coastal gardens
- We'll focus first on Santa Cruz Island with its several different habitats including...

Rugged mountains with a patchwork of grasslands, woodlands, and chaparral. Here is a view of the main valley with its gravelly alluvium soils



On these slopes you see a mixture of chaparral with some scattered oaks and an ironwood forest in the canyon bottom.



The endemic fernleaf ironwood (*Lyonothamnus floribundus asplenifolius*) forms localized copses where there's a high water table



Coastal canyons segue from riparian areas to sandy dunes and beaches



The sand dunes provide habitat for such beautiful island endemics as rose buckwheat (*Eriogonum grande rubescens*)



Other habitats include rocky outcrops and cliffs which favor low shrubs such as the endemic Santa Cruz Island buckwheat (*Eriogonum arborescens*)



Other plants on these rocky areas include the silver-leaf
Hazardia detonsa and the bush monkeyflower known
as *Mimulus longiflorus*



Canyon bottoms with a high water table not only favor trees but the beautiful Humboldt lily (*Lilium humboldtii ocellata*)



Coastal bluffs provide habitat for low-growing, wind-adapted perennials such as this island goldenbush (*Isocoma menziesii sedoides*)



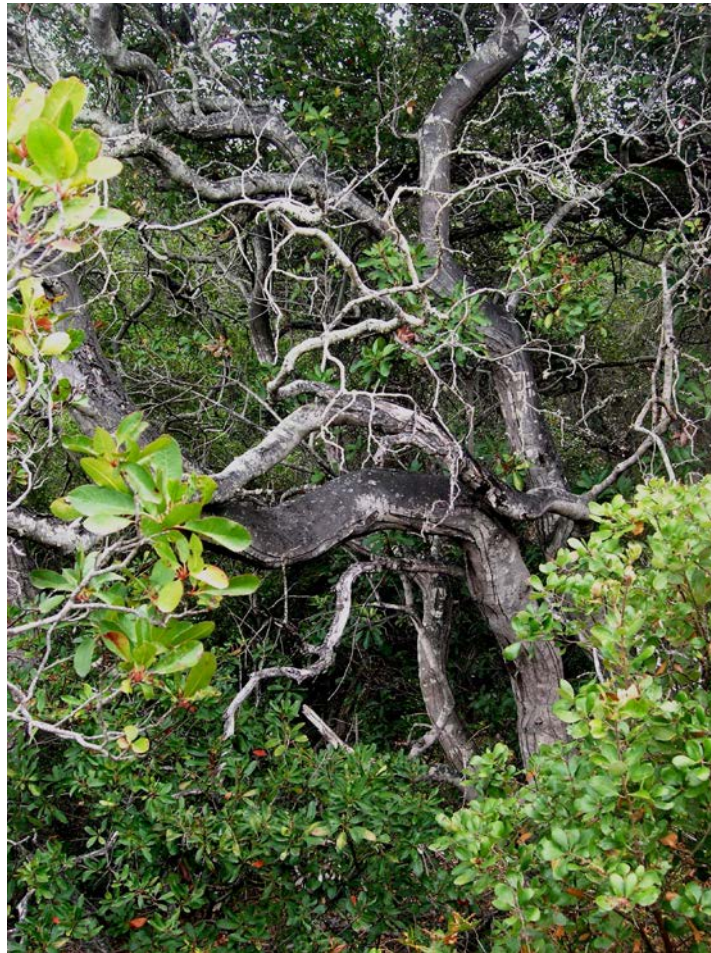
Here you see a view of a forest on a north-facing slope.
Other woodlands and forests occur in valley bottoms.



Besides the unique and relic stands of Ironwood, the islands feature several kinds of oaks, the most common being the coast live oak. In addition, the large and handsome island oak (*Quercus tomentella*) occurs in protected canyons.



Well known to mainlanders, the toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*) often grows as a large tree.



Other trees include the endemic island cherry (*Prunus ilicifolia lyonii*) with its smooth, shiny, evergreen leaves



The bishop pine (*Pinus muricata*), once thought to be different from its mainland counterparts, forms localized forests in the fog belt.



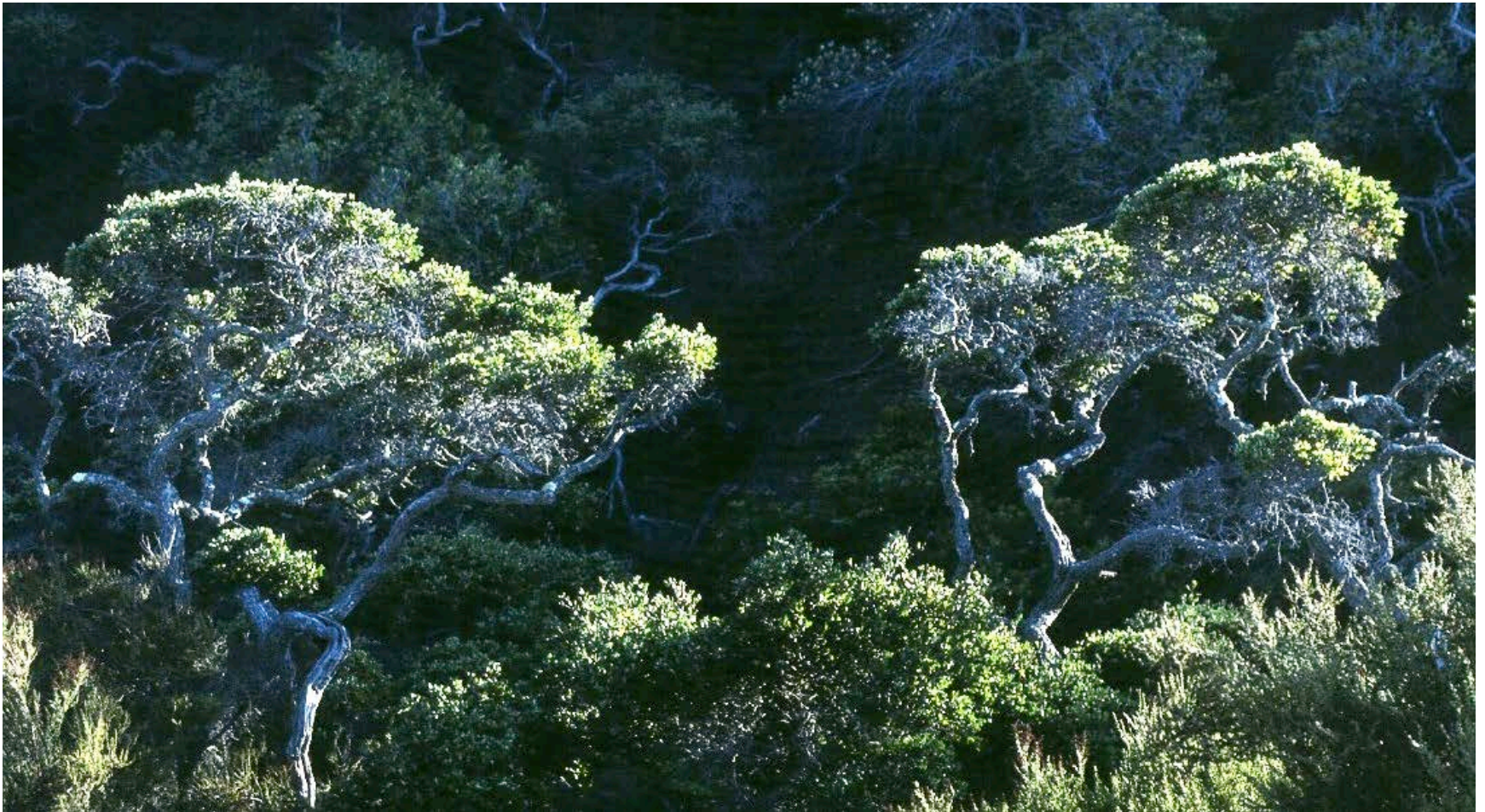
Island shrubs occur in many habitats. The following are examples of some of the many handsome shrubs that make excellent garden subjects. Here you see the island bush poppy, *Dendromecon harfordii*.



Some shrubs like the prostrate island form of chamise (*Adenostoma fasciculatum prostratum*) are adapted to windy island conditions.



Two of the island's oaks are shrubs, sometimes with real personality as you see here with the island scrub oak (*Quercus pacifica*)



The rare Santa Cruz Island shreve oak (*Q. parvula* var. *shrevei*) features prickly, hollylike leaves

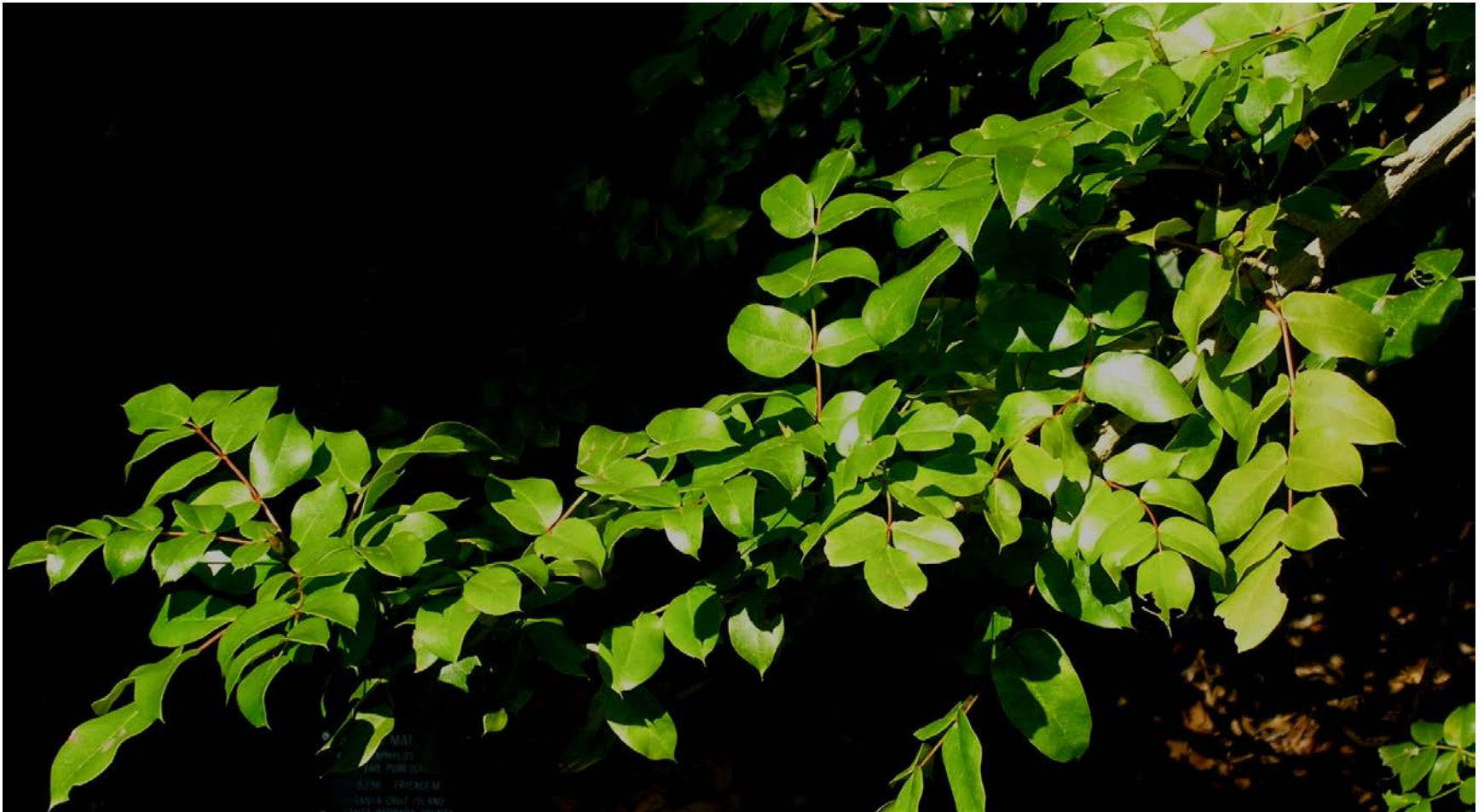


Alive or dead, the island manzanita (*Arctostaphylos insularis*) has a beautiful form.





The rare island barberry (*Berberis pinnata insularis*) differs from its mainland counterpart by lacking prickly leaves



The tree ceanothus (*Ceanothus arboreus*) is the tallest species with the largest leaves and flower clusters



As well, the island mountain mahogany (*Cercocarpus betuloides blanchiae*) is a larger plant. Here you see the backlit hairy fruits.



Summer holly (*Comarostaphylis diversifolia*) is a special island shrub related to madrone and manzanita. Here you see the bright red summer berries.



The fast-growing, evergreen malva rosa (*Malva assurgentiflora*) is a one-of-a-kind bush mallow from Catalina Island.



A host of smaller shrubs also find their homes on islands. Here you see a special prostrate form of California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica* 'Canyon Gray')



The tree coreopsis (*Coreopsis gigantea*) is an example of an unusually large form of a normally smaller, herbaceous plant.



Besides the shrubby Santa Cruz Island buckwheat seen here, Catalina Island is home to its own shrub buckwheat...



Saint Catherine's lace (*Eriogonum giganteum*), the largest of the entire genus



A Catalina Island endemic shrub is Catalina lace
(*Constancea nevinii*) a relative of mainland
eriophyllums



Another endemic Catalina Island shrublet is the island snapdragon (*Galvezia speciosa*)



A lovely small shrub related to the sages is the island picther-sage (*Lepechinia fragrans*)



Besides the more common bush monkeyflower (*Mimulus longiflorus*), Santa Cruz Island features the hummingbird-pollinated *M. flemingii*



Unique among the currants is the Catalina perfume (*Ribes viburnifolium*), the only evergreen species.



The Santa Rosa Island sage (*Salvia brandegei*) is a winter-flowering relative of the mainland black sage (*S. mellifera*)



Several of the succulent dudleyas are endemic to the islands. Here you see the candelabra-holder dudleya (*D. candelabrum*) in its rocky home.



The rarest of the dudleyas, *D. nesiotica*, is confined to one coastal field on the extreme northwestern corner of Santa Cruz Island. It goes dormant to a corm in summer.



One herbaceous perennial buckwheat in the northern Channel Islands is the gorgeous rose buckwheat (*E. grande rubescens*), which lives on sand dunes



The island alumroot (*Heuchera maxima*), the giant of its genus, makes beautiful clumps in dry shade



Another island gem of a perennial is the snowy-leaved lotus, *Lotus argophyllus niveus*, which has proved difficult to grow

