

Western Sycamore (*Platanus racemosa*)



Summary:

The western sycamore tree is native to California and Baja California, and can be found as far north as Humboldt County (Calscape n.d.). These trees grow in high moisture zones across a variety of environments, from streams to gullies (Bracewell and Rawlings 2023). Western sycamores are also found in a biome unique to California called a Sycamore Alluvial Wetland, where they dominate the foothills of the southern Sierra Nevadas and the California Coastal Range (Ornduff et al 2003).

Western sycamores are deciduous and shed their leaves in the fall. They grow up to 115 feet tall with a trunk diameter up to one meter. Their trunks tend to divide into two, eventually splitting into many branches. The bark ranges from white to light brown and peels as it ages. Western sycamore leaves are large and lobed, reaching widths of nearly 10 inches. Newly grown leaves are translucent green and gradually shift to vibrant orange and yellow as fall approaches (Calscape n.d.).

Western Sycamores and Fire

Though the research on western sycamores and fires is limited, multiple sources suggest the tree is relatively fire-resistant under the correct conditions (RCD Santa Cruz 2018). While it won't hold up as well as a species like a redwood tree in the event of a major wildfire, western sycamores often survive and resprout. Their survival, however, is contingent on moisture-rich soil and, in turn, moisture-rich bark (CNPS 2018). If one can maintain proper moisture levels, these trees are often recommended for use in fire-resistant landscaping (Aoyagi 2021).



References:

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