

Twenty Undeservedly Rare Trees for Southern California

By Matt Ritter, Ken Greby, Randy Baldwin, and Dylan Hannon

A great diversity of different tree species can be grown in Southern California's mild climate. Diverse tree plantings are more interesting and beautiful, and they make the urban forest more resilient to pests and diseases.

Yet, most trees sold and planted widely in Southern California come from a list of no more than a hundred or so species. The nursery and landscape industries are risky businesses, and growers and designers are often hesitant to experiment with new trees.

When we grow only trees that are proven to succeed, we run the risk of continuing to diminish species diversity in our urban forests and never discovering new species that might prove to be of great merit. Nothing ventured...nothing gained.

Here is a list of twenty undeservedly rare tree species that do well in Southern California and should be grown more often and widely than they are.

1. *Acacia pendula* – Weeping Myall

Fabaceae, Eastern Australia, Synonym: *Acacia leucophylla*
Evergreen, Small

Upright narrow crown of weeping branchlets, silvery-blue leaves, and small yellow flowers. Slow growing and drought resistant.



Alectryon excelsus. Photo: M. Ritter.

2. *Alectryon excelsus* – New Zealand Ash or Titoki

Sapindaceae, New Zealand
Evergreen, Small

Dense crown of shiny compound leaves. Fruit opens to expose bright red interior with black seeds.



Angophora costata. Photo: K. Greby.

3. *Angophora costata* – Rose Gum

Myrtaceae, Eastern Australia, Synonym: *Eucalyptus apocynifolia*
Evergreen, Large

Beautiful smooth pink to pale rust colored bark. Upright Eucalyptus-like form. Can eventually develop a large basal swelling.



Bischofia javanica. Photo: K. Greby.

4. *Bischofia javanica* – Toog Tree

Phyllanthaceae, Southeast Asia
Evergreen, Large

Slow growing, dense canopy of shiny dark-green leathery compound leaves and inconspicuous flowers and fruit. Does well near the coast.

5. *Caesalpinia ferrea* – Leopard Tree

Fabaceae, Brazil
Partially deciduous, Small

Smooth gray, green, and brown mottled bark, flat canopy of lacy divided leaves, and bright yellow flowers. Deep rooted, tolerates drought.

6. *Callistemon salignus* – Willow Bottlebrush

Myrtaceae, Eastern Australia, Synonym: *Melaleuca salicina*
Evergreen, Small

Attractive pendulous foliage, white papery bark, white to pink bottlebrush-like flowers, and bronze flushes of new growth.



Castanospermum australe. Photo: K. Greby.

7. *Castanospermum australe* – Moreton Bay Chestnut

Fabaceae, Eastern Australia
Evergreen, Large

Dense rounded crown of glossy dark green compound leaves, red and yellow pea-shaped flowers, and large cylindrical fruit.

8. *Cryptocarya rubra* – Red Laurel

Lauraceae, Chile
Evergreen, Medium

Compact form with dense spreading crown of scented leaves and coppery new growth. Long lived.



Dalbergia sissoo. Photo: K. Greby.

9. *Dalbergia sissoo* – Sissoo

Fabaceae, India
Deciduous, Medium

Open, erect crown of light green foliage and rough flaking bark. Drought resistant.



Elaeocarpus sylvestris. Photo: M. Ritter.

10. *Elaeocarpus sylvestris* – Japanese Blueberry Tree

Elaeocarpaceae, Japan and China, Synonym: *Elaeocarpus decipiens*

Evergreen, Small

Dense canopy of glossy, dark green foliage. Older leaves turn bright red before dropping. Small white flowers and blue-black fruit.

11. *Eucalyptus spathulata* – Swamp Mallet

Myrtaceae, Southwest Australia

Evergreen, Medium

Beautiful, smooth coppery trunk, willow-like olive colored foliage, not messy. Drought resistant.

12. *Ficus sur* – Cape Fig

Moraceae, South Africa, Synonym: *Ficus capensis*

Evergreen, Medium

Lush canopy of dissected leaves, small maroon figs emerge from smooth gray trunk.



Harpephyllum caffrum. Photo: K. Greby.

13. *Harpephyllum caffrum* – Kaffir Plum

Anacardiaceae, South Africa

Evergreen, Medium

Smooth gray bark, luxuriant, dense crown, strong branch structure, and edible red fruit on female trees.

14. *Melaleuca styphelioides* – Prickly-leaved Paperbark

Myrtaceae, Eastern Australia

Evergreen, Large

Pendulous branches of small prickly leaves and tan-colored papery bark. Tolerates various growing conditions, long-lived, and produces little litter.

15. *Peltophorum dubium* – Yellow Poinciana

Fabaceae, South America

Partially deciduous, Medium

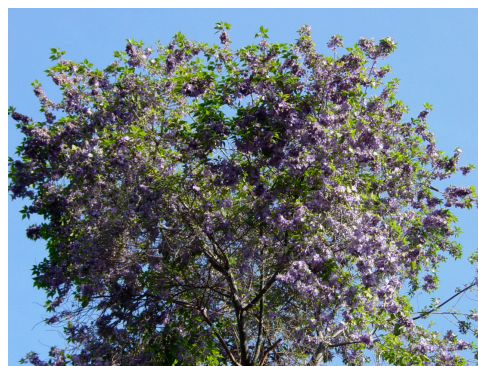
Fast growing, prolific, artificial-grape-scented yellow flowers for short period, and bright green fern-like foliage.

16. *Quercus hypoleucoides* – Silverleaf Oak

Fagaceae, Southern U.S. and Mexico, Synonym: *Quercus confertifolia*

Partially deciduous, Small

Flaking bark, dense canopy of leathery dark-green leaves that are silvery, down beneath. Drought tolerant and low maintenance.



Robinsonella cordata. Photo: K. Greby.

17. *Robinsonella cordata* – Blue Hibiscus Tree

Malvaceae, Mexico and Guatemala

Partially deciduous, Medium

Slender crown, gray bark, fuzzy heart-shaped leaves, profuse blooms of lavender-blue Hibiscus-like flowers.

18. *Sophora secundiflora* – Texas Mountain Laurel

Fabaceae, Southern U.S. and Mexico, Synonym: *Calia secundiflora*

Evergreen, Small

Bright green compound leaves and showy, pendulous, Wisteria-like, grape-scented, deep purple flowers. Highly toxic red seeds. Slow growing and drought tolerant.



Sophora secundiflora. Photo: M. Ritter.

19. *Syzygium smithii* – Lilly-Pilly

Myrtaceae, Eastern Australia, Synonym: *Acmena smithii*

Evergreen, Small

Compact crown of shiny leaves with coppery red new growth, small white flowers and attractive mauve fruit. Slow growing.



Taxodium huegelii. Photo: K. Greby.

20. *Taxodium huegelii* – Montezuma Bald Cypress

Taxodiaceae, Mexico and Texas, Synonym: *Taxodium mucronatum*

Partially deciduous, Large

Stout trunk with light tan shredded bark and broad spreading crown of pendulous branchlets and small needles. Long lived and does well in water or not.