Photo by Jesus Lozano

San Francisco Recommended Street Tree Species List

Updated August 2024

Introduction

Growing the urban forest canopy is a central goal of the San Francisco Urban Forest Plan, and the approved street tree list provides easy to understand guidance on finding trees well-suited to our unique growing conditions. The San Francisco Urban Forestry Council periodically reviews and updates this list of trees in collaboration with public and non-profit urban forestry stakeholders, including San Francisco Public Works, Bureau of Urban Forestry and Friends of the Urban Forest. The Recommended Street Tree List was approved by the Urban Forestry Council on August 27th, 2024.

This list is intended to be used for the public realm of streets and associated spaces and plazas that are generally under the jurisdiction of Public Works. While the focus is on the streetscape, e.g., tree wells in the public sidewalks, the list makes accommodations for other areas in the public realm, e.g., "Street Parks." While this list recommends species that are known to do well in many locations in San Francisco, no tree is perfect for every potential tree planting location. This list should be used as a guideline for choosing which street tree to plant but should not be used without the help of an arborist or other tree professional. *All street tree site and species selections must be approved by Public Works before planting*.

Section 1 is a list of local native tree and arborescent shrub species that are appropriate for sites in the public realm that have more space than the sidewalk planting wells, for example, stairways, "Street Parks," plazas, and sidewalk gardens, though there are cases where these species are successful in the sidewalk tree wells. The local native species in Section 1 provide optimum habitat for local wildlife. Sections 2 and 3 of the list are focused on trees appropriate for sidewalk tree wells, and Section 4 is intended as a list of trees that have limited use cases and/or are being considered as street trees. Finally in section 5 a table of palms is provided. While not broadly recommended, palms may be suitable in culturally sensitive sites or sites with significant growing constraints. The application form to plant a street tree can be found at http://sfpublicworks.org/plant-street-tree.

Biodiversity, Habitat and Climate Change

The City of San Francisco, like other cities around the world, has been accelerating its actions and goal-setting in relation to the interlinked crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. Climate change and biodiversity have figured prominently in Urban Forestry Council conversations, during which many people have advocated for planting local native trees and shrubs to support local pollinators and other wildlife, in order to stem the tide toward an impending global insect apocalypse. Street trees can play a role in climate mitigation and adaptation and in providing habitat for local wildlife. The Recommended Street Tree List is part of the City's larger climate action strategy and can contribute to creating a truly biodiverse San Francisco.

Opportunities for Greening and Supporting Wildlife in the City

In addition to street trees, the City provides many other programs and opportunities for supporting biodiversity and climate resilience in the urban environment. Public Works manages the Street Parks Program and the Sidewalk Landscaping Permit. Both of these programs hold great potential to install local native plants for wildlife and climate resilience. The San Francisco Plant Finder is a City website that provides recommended plant lists for bringing wildlife habitat into the urban environment. Consult sfenvironment.org/biodiversity as a portal to much more information about the city's ecology and natural heritage.

For San Franciscans who have the opportunity – whether a front or backyard or other significant space - and are keenly interested in planting a tree for local wildlife habitat, the City strongly recommends planting local native species, taking care to use seeds or plants that are produced from local San Francisco stock. Consult the City's bee-friendly nurseries page for sources of local native plants.

Section 1: Local Natives - these are tree and arborescent shrub species that are appropriate for some locations in the public realm, including stairways, plazas and "Street Parks," as well as sidewalk gardens and wider sidewalks with large cut-outs.
Local native trees and shrubs are optimum for providing wildlife habitat throughout the city.

Species (bolded trees are evergreen)	**Common Name**	**Minimum Sidewalk Width**	**Utility Friendly ***	**Drought Tolerant**	**Allergy Friendly**	**Notes** (Lepidoptera are pollinators which are critical to native ecosystem function. LC refers to the "Lepidoptera Confirmed" while LL refers to "Likely Lepidoptera" which are supported by each tree species.)
Aesculus californica	California buckeye	15	Yes	Yes	No	Indigenous occurrence on Yerba Buena Island near Macalla Rd and Treasure Island Rd (LC-2/LL-11)
Ceanothus thyrsiflorus	California lilac	7.5	Yes	Yes	No	Grows quickly in the right conditions; birds and bees (LC-14/LL-79)
Garrya elliptica	silk tassel	7.5	Yes	Yes	No	Lyrical, hanging flowers
Heteromeles arbutifolia	toyon	10	Yes	Yes	Yes	Local native, Beautiful red berries in late fall; birds and bees. Train early for tree form; great for sidewalk landscaping (LC-4/LL-4)
Myrica (Morella) californica	California wax myrtle	10	No	Yes	No	Beautiful as a hedge or specimen tree; needs a moist site; (LL-22)
Prunus ilicifolia	holly-leafed cherry	12	No	Yes	No	Spectacular indigenous occurrence at the top of Bayview Hill; birds and bees (LC-4/LL-140)
Quercus agrifolia	coast live oak	15	No	Yes	No	San Francisco's most common native tree species; Landmark tree at 23rd and Castro; birds and bees (LC-41/LL-122)
Quercus chrysolepis	canyon live oak	15	No	Yes	Yes	Indigenous occurrence at Lake Merced; birds and bees (LC-14/LL-165)
Rhamnus (Frangula) californica	California coffeeberry	10	Yes	Yes	Yes	Widely planted for attractive leaves; birds and bees (LC-10/LL-23)
Sambucus cerulea	blue elderberry	12	Yes	Yes	No	Landmark tree near Folsom Street at Bernal Heights Blvd.; birds and bees (LL-23)

Information in the Notes column regarding pollinators and lepidoptera (butterflies and moths) is from the Urban Forest Ecosystems Institute website, the Yerba Buena Chapter of the California Native Plant Society, the National Wildlife Federation and the Calscape website.

***Will not interfere with typical overhead high-voltage wires.**

Section 2: Tree species, varieties, and cultivars that do well in most sidewalk locations in San Francisco.						
Species (bolded trees are evergreen)	**Common Name**	**Minimum Sidewalk Width**	**Utility Friendly ***	**Drought Tolerant**	**Allergy Friendly**	**Notes** (Lepidoptera are pollinators which are critical to native ecosystem function. LC refers to the "Lepidoptera Confirmed" while LL refers to "Likely Lepidoptera" which are supported by each tree species.)
Callistemon citrinus	lemon bottlebrush	10	Yes	Yes	No	Grows low; wide canopy and needs a wide sidewalk; sticky flowers; pollinators.
Crataegus phaenopyrum	Washington hawthorn	7.5	Yes	No	Yes	Subject to pests; has thorns; may be susceptible to fire blight; pollinators.
Lagunaria patersonii	primrose tree	10	No	No	No	Grows well in windy areas; pollinators.
Lophostemon confertus	Brisbane box	12	No	Yes	Yes	Formerly *Tristania conferta*; fast grower.
Magnolia grandiflora 'Little Gem'	'Little Gem' magnolia	7.5	Yes	No	No	Proven success; pollinators.
Magnolia grandiflora 'Sam Sommers,' 'Majestic Beauty,' 'D.D. Blanchard'	southern magnolia	12	No	No	No	Proven success; pollinators.
Melaleuca quinquenervia	broad-leaf paperbark	10	No	Yes	No	Grows fast, dense, irregular form; prefers wind protection; sensitive to cold.
Platanus x acerifolia 'Columbia'	London plane; sycamore	10	No	No	No	Prefers wind protection; susceptible to anthracnose and powdery mildew; observation needed.
Podocarpus gracilior/Afrocarpus falcatus	fern pine	12	No	Yes	Yes	Slow rooter.
Quercus suber	cork oak	12	No	No	No	Needs a large basin and wide sidewalk.
Tristaniopsis laurina	tristania; water gum	12	Yes	No	Yes	Standard species ONLY. 'Elegant' variety NOT recommended. Formerly known as *Tristania laurina*; pollinators.

Section 3: Tree species, varieties, and cultivars that do well with certain special considerations as noted; may not be appropriate for planting broadly throughout San Francisco.						
Species (bolded trees are evergreen)	**Common Name**	**Minimum Sidewalk Width**	**Utility Friendly ***	**Drought Tolerant**	**Allergy Friendly**	**Notes** (Lepidoptera are pollinators which are critical to native ecosystem function. LC refers to the "Lepidoptera Confirmed" while LL refers to "Likely Lepidoptera" which are supported by each tree species.)
Arbutus x 'Marina'	'Marina' madrone	10	Yes	Yes	Yes	Fruit drop can range from low volume to significant. May be short lived; may need to be replanted in 20-25 years; pollinators.
Cassia leptophylla	gold medallion tree	10	Yes	No	Yes	Semi-evergreen; requires extensive early maintenance.
Ceanothus 'Ray Hartman'	California lilac tree	7.5	Yes	Yes	No	CA Native cultivar. Not good for narrow sidewalks; pollinators.
Corymbia ficifolia	red-flowering gum	12	No	Yes	Yes	Needs a very large basin and wide sidewalk; drops large seed pods; pollinators.
Corymbia maculata/Eucalyptus m.	spotted gum	12	No	Yes	Yes	Experimental, should do well in climate; lots of mature trees doing well now.
Crataegus x lavallei	Lavalle hawthorn	7.5	Yes	No	Yes	Appears to be less susceptible to fire blight and other pests compared to other Crataegus; pollinators.
Eriobotrya deflexa	bronze loquat	10	Yes	No	Yes	Needs wind protection; does not perform well in sandy soils; susceptible to fire blight; pollinators.
Ginkgo biloba ' 'Princeton Sentry,' 'Saratoga'	ginkgo; maidenhair	12	No	No	No	Slow grower; prefers wind protection.
Hymenosporum flavum	sweetshade	10	No	No	Yes	Uneven performer; prefers heat, wind protection, and good drainage; pollinators.
Jacaranda mimosifolia	jacaranda	10	No	No	Yes	Uneven performer; prefers heat, wind protection, and good drainage; spring leaf drop.
Koelreuteria bipinnata	Chinese flame tree	10	Yes	No	Yes	Structural failure concerns.
Laurus nobilis 'Saratoga'	'Saratoga' bay laurel	10	Yes	Yes	Yes	Uneven performer; prefers heat; needs some wind protection; susceptible to pests.
Lyonothamnus floribundus asplenifolius	Catalina ironwood	10	No	Yes	Yes	CA Native. Prefers heat and wind protection; prone to transplant shock; very susceptible to phytophthora.
Magnolia champaca/M. x alba	champak	10	Yes	No	Yes	Formerly *Michelia champaca*; needs wind protection; wide sidewalk; gets powdery mildew and very slow grower; pollinators

Magnolia doltsopa	sweet michelia	10	No	No	Yes	Formerly *Michelia doltsopa*; uneven performer; grafted trees grow very slowly; prefers heat; needs wind protection; pollinators
Melaleuca linariifolia	flax-leaf paperbark	10	Yes	Yes	No	Does well in SF.
Metrosideros excelsa	New Zealand Christmas tree	15	No	Yes	Yes	Needs a very large basin and very wide sidewalks; pollinators.
Olea europaea	fruitless olive	12	Yes	Yes	No	Needs a very large basin; prefers wind protection; Swan Hill and Wilsoni preferred; **California Invasive Plant Council listed Limited do not plant near natural areas.**
Pistacia chinensis 'Keith Davey' or standard	Chinese pistache	10	Yes	Yes	Yes	Prefers heat and wind protection. Weak branches require frequent and early pruning.
Pyrus kawakamii	evergreen pear	10	No	No	No	Plant only in warmest areas of city. Semi-evergreen; leaf spot/fungus likely to occur and may cause premature leaf drop; does not flower well in our climate; susceptible to fire blight.
Quillaja saponaria	Chilean soapbark	10	No	Yes	Yes	Availability improving; thrives everywhere; pollinators.
Ulmus parvifolia 'Drake,'	Chinese elm	10	No	No	No	Fast grower; requires extensive pruning and maintenance.

Section 4: Tree species, varieties, and cultivars with limited use cases and potential site restrictions as noted.						
Species (bolded trees are evergreen)	**Common Name**	**Minimum Sidewalk Width**	**Utility Friendly ***	**Drought Tolerant**	**Allergy Friendly**	**Notes** (Lepidoptera are pollinators which are critical to native ecosystem function. LC refers to the "Lepidoptera Confirmed" while LL refers to "Likely Lepidoptera" which are supported by each tree species.)
Acer buergerianum	trident maple	10	Yes	Yes	No	Prefers heat, wind protection, and needs summer water.
Acer circinatum	vine maple	10	Yes	No	No	CA Native; 10 lepidoptera confirmed, 55 likely
Aesculus hippocastanum	horse chestnut	15	No	No	No	Not clear if successful in SF yet; needs summer water.
Aesculus x carnea	red horse chestnut	10	No	No	No	Gets windburn easily in summer even in protected sites; early deciduous; climate concerns; needs summer water; pollinators.
Agonis flexuosa 'Burgundy'	'Burgundy' peppermint willow	10	Yes	Yes	Yes	Better form and structure than other dark-leaf cultivars; fast grower.
Angophora costata	Sydney red gum	12	No	Yes	Yes	
Banksia integrifolia	coast banksia	12	No	Yes	Yes	Requires extensive early maintenance.
Brachychiton acerifolius	flame tree	15	No	Yes	Yes	Semi-deciduous.

Brachychiton populneus	bottle tree	12	No	Yes	Yes	Prefers heat and wind protection; needs a large basin due to thick trunk.
Ceanothus 'Cliff Schmidt'; Ceanothus arboreus	California lilac tree	7.5	Yes	Yes	No	CA Native cultivar. Additional cultivar and standard species (currently only planting 'Ray Hartman'); insects
Cedrela fissilis	Brazilian cedarwood	12	No	No	No	Good results so far and needs more time; do not plant under powerlines.
Ceiba speciosa	silk floss tree	15	No	Yes	N/A	Prefers heat, wind protection, large basins.
Celtis sinensis	Chinese hackberry	12	No	No	No	Prefers heat and needs wind protection; uneven performer; gets pests.
Corylus colurna	Turkish hazel	15	No	No	No	Not clear if successful in SF yet.
Corymbia citriodora	Lemon-scented gum	15	No	Yes	Yes	
Elaeocarpus decipiens	Japanese blueberry	10	No	Yes	N/A	Slow growing; keep out of strong/prevailing wind; flowers but may not produce fruit at maturity.
Eucalyptus conferruminata/E. lehmanni	bushy yate	10	Yes	Yes	Yes	Wide canopy; large space needed; pollinators.
Eucalyptus nicholii	willow-leaf peppermint	12	No	No	Yes	Experimental; should do well in SF climate.
Eucalyptus polyanthemos	silver dollar gum	15	No	Yes	Yes	Needs a large basin; fast grower; high maintenance; drops limbs; pollinators.
Geijera parviflora	Australian willow	10	No	No	Yes	Prefers heat and needs wind protection; pollinators.
Koelreuteria elegans ssp. formosana	Chinese flame tree	10	Yes	No	Yes	Semi-deciduous.
Leucadendron argenteum	Silver leaf tree	10	No	Yes	N/A	Needs a large basin and no overhead lines.
Liriodendron tulipifera	tulip tree	12	No	No	Yes	Uneven performer; susceptible to aphids followed by sooty mold; requires summer water.
Melaleuca ericifolia	swamp paperbark	10	Yes	Yes	No	Not often planted, but most look good.
Melaleuca squamophloia	scaly paperbark	7.5	Yes	Yes	No	Not often planted but should do well.
Melaleuca styphelioides	prickly-leaf paperbark	10	Yes	No	No	Can root poorly; prickly leaves.

Metrosideros collina 'Springfire'	'ohi'a lehua	10	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Pittosporum rhombifolium/ Auranticarpa rhombifolia	Queensland pittosporum	10	Yes	Yes	N/A	Use in warmer parts of the city.
Pittosporum undulatum	Victorian box	10	No	No	N/A	**California Invasive Plant Council listed Watch do not plant near natural areas.**
Platanus racemosa 'Roberts'	California sycamore 'Roberts'	12	No	No	No	CA Native. Large basin and wide sidewalk; birds (LC-3/LL-8)
Prunus lyonii	Catalina cherry	7.5	Yes	Yes	Yes	CA Native. Fruit drop may get messy; pollinators
Prunus subhirtella 'Autumnalis'	Higan cherry	10	Yes	No	Yes	Tolerates mild winters better than other flowering cherry species.
Quercus coccinea	scarlet oak	12	No	No	No	Experimental.
Quercus engelmannii	Engelmann oak	12	No	Yes	No	CA Native (extreme south)
Quercus frainetto 'Forest Green'	Italian oak	12	No	No	No	Availability improving; more testing needed.
Quercus hypoleucoides	Silverleaf oak	15	No	Yes	No	Native to Sonoran desert biome.
Quercus ilex	holly oak	12	No	No	No	Needs wind protection; sidewalk space; gets powdery mildew.
Quercus phellos	willow oak	15	No	No	No	More performance testing needed; requires summer water.
Quercus rugosa	Netleaf oak	15	No	Yes	No	Native to Mexico.
Quercus tomentella	island oak	12	No	Yes	No	CA Native. Availability improving; birds (LC-1/LL-30)
Quercus virginiana	southern live oak	12	No	No	No	Continue to test; doing well so far.
Quercus wislizeni	Interior live oak	15	No	No	No	Bay Area Native
Tilia tomentosa	silver linden	12	No	No	No	Performance testing needed.
Ulmus japonica x wilsoniana 'Accolade'	accolade elm	15	No	No	No	More performance testing needed.
Ulmus parvifolia x carpinifolia 'Frontier'	frontier elm	12	No	No	No	More performance testing needed.
Ulmus propinqua 'Emerald Sunshine'	emerald sunshine elm	10	No	No	No	More performance testing needed.
Ulmus wilsoniana 'Prospector'	prospector elm	12	No	No	No	More performance testing needed.

Section 5: Palms, these provide fewer community benefits such as shade and carbon sequestration but may be suitable given site constraints.						
Species	**Common Name**	**Minimum Sidewalk Width**	**Utility Friendly ***	**Drought Tolerant**	**Allergy Friendly**	**Notes** (Lepidoptera are pollinators which are critical to native ecosystem function. LC refers to the "Lepidoptera Confirmed" while LL refers to "Likely Lepidoptera" which are supported by each tree species.)
Archontophoenix cunninghamiana	king palm	10	No	No	Yes	Needs wind protection and water.
Brahea clara	Mexican blue palm	10	No	No	Yes	Does well in many SF climates.
Brahea edulis	Guadalupe palm	12	Yes	Yes	Yes	Needs a large basin.
Butia odorata	southern jelly palm	7.5	Yes	No	Yes	Does well in many SF climates.
Cordyline australis	Cabbage tree	15	Yes	Yes	Yes	Needs very large basin; **do not plant near natural areas.**
Howea forsteriana	Kentia palm	10	Yes	No	Yes	Does well in many SF climates.
Parajubaea sunkha	Sunkha palm	10	No	Yes	N/A	Does well in many SF climates.
Parajubaea torallyi	Bolivian mountain coconut palm	15	No	No	N/A	Does well in many SF climates; big
Phoenix dactylifera 'Medjool' or 'Zahidi'	date palm	12	No	Yes	No	Needs a large basin and wide sidewalk.
Syagrus romanzoffiana	queen palm	10	No	No	Yes	Needs heat, wind protection.
Trachycarpus fortunei, standard & 'Wagnerianus'	Chinese windmill palm	10	No	Yes	No	Does well in many SF climates.
Washingtonia robusta	Mexican fan palm	12	No	Yes	No	Prefers some warmth; **California Invasive Plant Council listed Moderate do not plant near natural areas.**

Selected Resources

Bee-Friendly Nurseries
https://www.sfenvironment.org/bee-friendly-plant-nurseries

California Native Plant Society, Yerba Buena Chapter
http://cnps-yerbabuena.org/

California Native Plant Society, Calscape
https://calscape.org/

City Trees
https://sfenvironment.org/city-trees

Friends of the Urban Forest
https://www.friendsoftheurbanforest.org/

Green Connections
https://sfplanning.org/project/green-connections?page=3002

iNaturalist
https://www.inaturalist.org/home

Local Plant Nurseries
http://sfplantfinder.org/resources.html#plant-nurseries

Park Forestry Improvement Program
https://sfrecpark.org/484/2008-Clean-Safe-Parks-Bond

SF Pollinators Portal
https://sfenvironment.org/pollinators

Recreation and Open Space Element
http://openspace.sfplanning.org/

Right Tree, Right Place
https://www.pge.com/righttreerightplace/

San Francisco Plant Finder
http://sfplantfinder.org/

San Francisco Trees
http://www.sftrees.com/

Sidewalk Landscaping
http://sfpublicworks.org/services/permits/sidewalk-landscaping

Street Parks Program
http://sfpublicworks.org/streetparks

Street Trees and Plants
http://www.sfpublicworks.org/trees

StreetTreeSF
https://sfpublicworks.org/streettreesf

Urban Forest Master Plan
https://sfplanning.org/urban-forest-plan?page=3166

Urban Forestry Council
https://sfenvironment.org/about/taskforce/urban-forestry-council

Urban Forest Ecosystems Institute
https://ufei.calpoly.edu/

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