

# TREES IN OAKLAND

A Publication of the Sierra Club Tree Team

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## THE DROUGHT AND YOUR TREE

The drought has been stressing plants throughout California, including the trees right here in Oakland. Even in years with average rainfall, Oakland sees almost no rain from May to October, so newly planted trees need extra water from their human caretakers until their roots are deep enough to reach the soil that stays cool and moist year-round. For now, here are some tips for keeping your trees healthy during the drought:

- Cover the root-zone with a layer of mulch at least 3” thick, but not touching the trunk directly. Mulch works as insulation from the hot sun and dry air, keeping the soil and roots cooler, reducing evaporation, and leaving more water for the tree. Bare soil might look “neat” to some people, but it is unhealthy for the tree. A simple mulch of chipped branches, leaves, or bark is fine; don’t bother with buying fancy mulch with colorants added. If your tree doesn’t have a good layer of mulch, contact the Sierra Club Tree Team and we’ll bring some by.
- Water your young trees deeply and infrequently. We recommend five gallons once per week for trees that have been in the ground for three years or less. Some older trees (but not native oaks) may also appreciate a deep soaking once or twice in a summer. Don’t make the mistake of giving a little water every day, because that encourages the roots to grow only in the upper part of the soil. But also be careful not to overwater—oddly enough, an overwatered tree may look like an underwatered tree, with dry brown leaves. Check how moist the soil is before you try to fix the problem by adding water: if you stick your finger two inches below the surface and the soil already feels moist, you don’t need to give the tree any more water.

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## RECENT GRANTS SUPPORT OUR WORK

In the last few months, we have received two major pots of money that will guide our activities for the next three years. Last fall, we wrote the proposal that got us \$42,000 from the Bank of America Charitable Foundation, sent through the American Forests group in Washington, D.C. The first round of those funds paid for 90 trees in the Oakland flatlands between January and April; the rest of the funds will pay for hundreds more. And this past July, we were awarded \$310,000 from the state’s cap-and-trade funds to plant 1,500 more trees in the East Oakland flatlands by the end of 2018. Our team has planted 1,350 trees in our five-year history, so this grant will mark a major ramp-up in the levels of our program. We owe thanks to the staff of Northgate Environmental Management, a woman-owned business here in Oakland, who helped us to shine through in a fiercely competitive field. Now to deliver what we know we can do.



The Tree Team brings another new tree to East Oakland

## **OUR NEEDS IN THE MONTHS AHEAD: PEOPLE, PLACES, AND THINGS**

Accomplishing in the next three years what previously took us over five years to do will challenge our organizational competence, as they say. From the beginning, our strength has been our volunteer labor base and our ability to plant a street tree for a small fraction of the cost of paid work crews. Founder and first coordinator Arthur Boone recently retired after five years and thousands of volunteer hours, and new coordinator Derek Schubert is getting things ready for the new planting season and beyond. Looking ahead, we will need more requests for trees at people's houses or businesses (or parks, libraries, or schools), more people to help at our Saturday morning work parties, more retrieval of the steel stakes from trees that have outgrown them, more tools and supplies lined up to use, more tracking and recordkeeping, etc. We can do it, but we need your help. E-mail or call us with your questions, offers to help, or locations of trees that don't need their stakes any longer.

## **FIREBLIGHT STRIKES OAKLAND'S ORNAMENTAL PEAR TREES**

A disease called fireblight has been striking two of the more common species of street trees in Oakland—evergreen pear trees and deciduous flowering pear trees (also variously called Callery, Bradford, or Aristocrat pears). Fireblight disfigures and can even kill trees, and although some trees can fight it off on their own, people can save a tree from further damage by pruning off the infected branches. Since Oakland's Tree Division no longer has enough employees to prune all of these diseased pear trees -- or even to perform basic maintenance-pruning on other kinds of street trees -- more and more pear trees are declining from fireblight. The Sierra Club Tree Team has decided to stop planting any more pear trees, because of the risk that the young trees simply won't live to maturity. If the City Council restores the Tree Division's budget in 2017 and more pruners become available to fight fireblight in our town, we may resume planting pear trees, but for now we will be planting tougher species of trees.

## **TREE TEAM ADDS PRUNING SERVICES**

People generally want the street-trees to have a straight vertical trunk with a canopy of branches high enough for people and vehicles to pass under safely, but it doesn't happen on its own. It takes deliberate pruning to remove a city tree's low branches and encourage the tree to devote its energy to growing up instead of sideways. Oakland's short-staffed Tree Division has been unable to perform this kind of proactive pruning since 2009, so hundreds or even thousands of trees around town are growing without proper direction. Chris Buckley, a retired planner for the city of Oakland, has been leading volunteer pruning workdays in West Oakland for several years under the auspices of the West Oakland Green Initiative (WOGI), and he lent his help to the SCTT this year. He trained volunteers in proper pruning techniques and advised them on which branches to remove for the long-term health of each tree. Over a series of Saturdays in the early months of 2015, volunteers with the Sierra Club Tree Team pruned more than 600 trees, mostly deciduous species in their winter dormancy. The team pruned a few dozen more evergreen trees over the summer. We will send out more pruning teams next winter, so if you want to join us as a pruner, we will appreciate your support.

## **NEW CITY BUDGET: STILL NO TREES**

The biennial Oakland city budget was adopted in June with much fanfare but again with no restoration of funding to the City's Tree Division (now at 9 employees instead of the 40 in its heyday). Several members of our advisory committee were quite active in buttonholing councilmembers and we especially appreciate the efforts of Councilmembers Kalb (District #1), Guillen (#2), and Gallo (#5) in supporting the cause of trees. All the available data suggest that the number of street trees in the city is declining or at best holding steady, as trees are dying to old age, accidents, or disease, but not enough new trees are planted to replace them. It seems inconsistent for a city to brag about its greenness but to keep losing trees like this. Please add your voice to our chorus by telling your Councilmember that you support increasing the funding for planting and maintaining trees.

## THREE TRILLION TREES ON EARTH... AND FALLING

In a new study published in *Nature* and then widely publicized, researchers from Yale University calculated that planet Earth has roughly 3 trillion trees on it, more than seven times the previous estimates of 400 billion. As high as 3 trillion may seem, the study concluded that the number of trees has dropped by 46% since the beginning of human civilization, from an earlier total of 5.6 trillion trees, and that Earth is losing 10 billion trees per year, mostly to deforestation and other human activity. The Tree Team is planting one tree at a time to help Oakland, but it will take a drastic change in societies around the world to restore Earth's forests.

## URBAN RELEAF WINS CAP-AND-TRADE FUNDS

Our fellow tree-planters, Oakland-based Urban Releaf, won a grant of \$775,000 from the state's cap-and-trade funds. Their project will plant 1,000 trees and a network of pollinator gardens, as well as run a job-development program in urban forestry for local youth. Urban Releaf's operations manager, Kevin Jefferson, also chairs the Oakland Urban Forestry Forum, which meets monthly to discuss tree policies and practices in the city. Hats off to Urban Releaf for their major funding breakthrough.

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### HELP GET MORE TREES PLANTED IN OAKLAND! DONATE TO THE SIERRA CLUB TREE TEAM

When you donate to the Sierra Club Tree Team, you will help get more trees planted in Oakland, as well as getting a charitable deduction on your tax return.

Please make out your check to "The Sierra Club Foundation", with a memo of "NACG Tree Team Account" [NACG = Northern Alameda County Group]. Gifts to The Sierra Club Foundation are tax-deductible.

Mail your check and this form to the following address:

Sierra Club Tree Team  
c/o Anna Robinson, Treasurer, Sierra Club NACG  
1865 San Pedro Ave  
Berkeley, CA 94707

Please indicate the amount of your donation:

- \$25: Pays for a refurbished steel stake to be placed at a newly planted tree, plus compost and mulch over the soil.
- \$50: Pays for a new tree from the nursery.
- \$75: Pays for a new tree plus the stake, compost, and mulch.
- \$200: Pays for removal of a rectangle of concrete, as well as a new tree, stake, compost, and mulch.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (other amount of your choosing)

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

We will let you know about future Tree Team plantings and other events.

For more information about the Sierra Club Tree Team, visit <http://sierraclub.org/san-francisco-bay/tree-planting>.