

# Chaparral

**Description:** Chaparral is a community of mostly shrubs. Chaparral shrubs are evergreen, and have thick, leathery leaves with waxy surfaces. Grasses and herbs are sparse or rare (except after a fire, when grasses and wildflowers briefly flourish). Chaparral is fire-prone and typically burns every 10-40 years.

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## Interesting facts

- Chaparral (composed of unrelated plant species) also grows in Mediterranean Europe, South Africa, Chile and Australia. These coastal areas all have mild, wet winters and dry summers.
- Because chaparral has a low canopy and grows on steep slopes, chaparral fires are hot, hot, hot; temperatures may exceed 1,200° F!
- Many chaparral plants have seeds that will only grow after a fire, and some species rely entirely on those seeds for their persistence, because the adult plants do not survive fires.
- Soils derived from serpentine rock are nutrient-poor (which makes it difficult for many plants to grow) and support distinctive plant communities, including plants that are found only on these unusual soils.

## Why is this community important?

- Numerous native plants and animals are found only in chaparral.
- Chaparral is the most extensive vegetation in many of our watersheds.
- Chaparral fires affect the safety of many rural and suburban communities.

**Conservation Status and Threats:** For some types of chaparral, large areas have been conserved. For other types, little or no land has been conserved, especially at lower elevations. Thus, development is a major threat in the Sierra Nevada foothills, and fire management practices (including post-fire seeding for erosion control) can have a major effect on chaparral communities.

