

## A Relationship with the Land

### Native California Indians and Nature

**Throughout the state, Indians carefully managed their environments.** Early European explorers described California as an earthly paradise where native inhabitants simply “survived” on what nature provided. Native California Indians, however, never left their sustenance to fate.

Through controlled burning, they cleared underbrush and promoted new growth of important plants. As they gathered grass seeds and turned soil to harvest bulbs, they unintentionally—and at times intentionally—spread plant species and caused them to multiply. In dry areas, many groups irrigated important crops in an effort to improve nature’s agricultural productivity. Such practices not only ensured an abundance of food, but also provided the raw materials for instruments of both utility and art, such as household items and ceremonial objects. Plant uses among California Indians varied from group to group.

As a lasting result of these activities, many of the remaining open spaces in California that we may think of as "natural" or "wild" actually bear the imprint of land management practices that go back thousands of years.

**Today, many Native California Indians continue these ancient relationships with the land.** Elders teach the younger generations how to tend plants to yield traditional foods and basketweaving materials. Where the thread of memory has broken, California Indians are reviving traditional practices through research and practice.

**Note: Plants within California State Parks are protected. Do not harvest plants or plant parts inside the park unless you have obtained a collecting permit from California State Parks.**

**Willow:** Bows and arrow shafts, twine, basket material; bark used as pain reliever.

**Toyon:** Edible berries. Leaves and bark used as medicine.

**California mugwort:** Medicinal and ceremonial use, insect repellent.

**Acorns:** Food.

**California wild rose:** Arrow shafts, fiber for twine, edible hips and flowers, medicinal use.

**Soaproot:** Medicinal uses, glue, material for brushes; bulb used fresh to stun fish, roasted for food.

**Soaproot Brush:** Processing of acorn flour, household cleaning, grooming.

