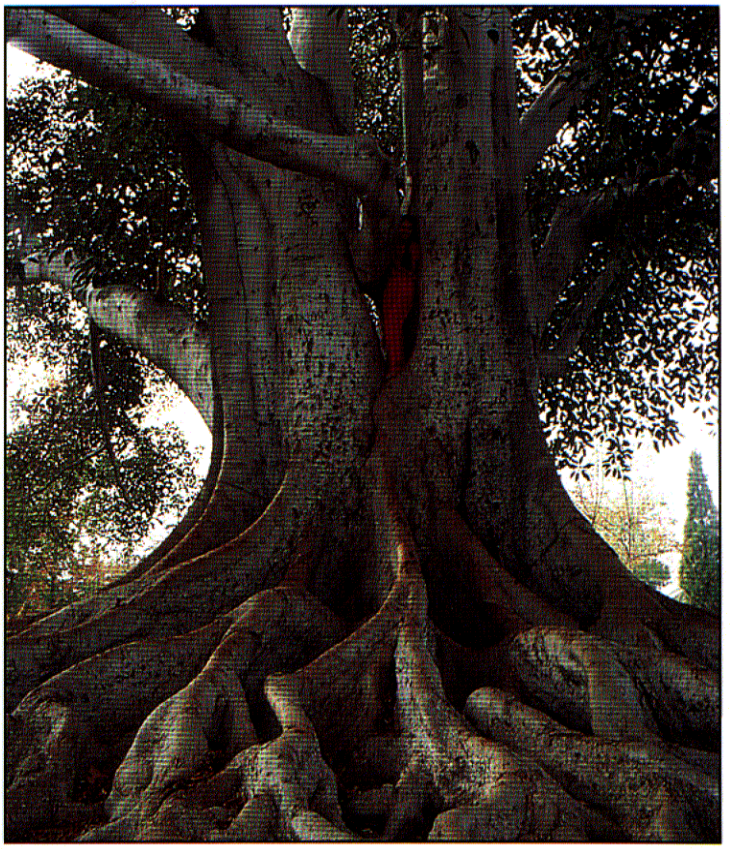
Trees and Shrubs in the Landscape

Large shrubs and trees greatly enhance the quality of landscapes and urban environments, but they can also have high maintenance requirements. Propagation of desert species, nitrogen-fixing trees and shrubs, and biological control of common pests were studied as ways to reduce maintenance.



Moreton Bay fig, *Ficus macrophylla*

Exceptional trees of Los Angeles

Donald Hodel

The variety of arborescent plant material in the landscape of Los Angeles County is perhaps unmatched anywhere in the world. Nearly 1000 species of trees are recorded. This abundance is due in part to the long and colorful history of ornamental horticulture in Los Angeles since the Spanish mission days of the eighteenth century, and in part to the remarkable diversity of climatic zones. From desert and alpine zones inland to frost-free, nearly tropical areas near the coast, enough microclimates exist to ensure that trees from just about every type of climate or area of the world can be grown somewhere in Los Angeles County.

Many outstanding specimen trees are worthy of recognition and preservation because of their age, size, historical or cultural value, rarity, aesthetic quality, and/or location. Unfortunately, many of these undocumented trees are not protected, and tremendous and increasing urban pressures put their continued existence in jeopardy.

Identifying unique trees

A project entitled Exceptional Trees of Los Angeles was initiated in 1984 with the goal of locating, identifying, and documenting outstanding or unique trees within the county, so that their status could be publicized and the community made aware of their value. A distinguished committee composed of individuals knowledgeable about ornamental horticulture was formed to assist the project leader in developing a pool of candidate trees to be considered for designation as "exceptional." Over 400 nominations were submitted by the committee and the project leader. The project leader developed an additional 600 nominations from books, journals, telephone tips, and other sources.

From late 1984 to early 1986, the project leader visited more than 1000 trees or groups of trees to collect and/or verify data and photograph specimens. During this field work, over 700 hours and 5,000 miles were logged. Extensive data files and a photographic library were compiled on the candidates under consideration.

The field work was completed in early 1986, and after evaluation of all pertinent data, the project leader made the final determination. About 160 trees or groups of trees from various municipalities throughout Los Angeles County were officially designated as "exceptional." These trees include 135 species in 80 genera, representing 36 families of flowering plants and gymnosperms. The species having the most specimen trees are Moreton Bay fig (*Ficus macrophylla*), with 10, and coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*) and tipu tree (*Tipuana tipu*), with 4 each. Ornamental figs (*Ficus*) and *Eucalyptus* share the honors for being the genera with the most species represented, with 10 each. The family with the most genera represented is the bean family (Leguminosae), with 12.

Some representative examples of trees or groups of trees listed are as follows:

King palm, *Archontophoenix cunninghamiana*. This grove of king palms, consisting of several hundred individuals, is the largest planting of this species outside its native Australia. The grove is exceptional in the number, size, age, aesthetic quality, and historical value of the trees. Situated in

Mexican fan palm, *Washingtonia robusta*

King palm, *Archontophoenix cunninghamiana*

Floss silk tree, *Chorisia speciosa*

Canary Island date palm, *Phoenix canariensis*

the Virginia Robinson Estate Gardens in Beverly Hills, which is owned and operated by the Los Angeles State and County Arboretum (LASCA), the grove was planted in about 1915 by the Robinson family around one of the first estates in the area. Virginia Robinson, the last owner, was heiress to the Robinson Department Store fortune and willed the garden to LASCA upon her death. This dense grove is much as one would find it in its native habitat, with naturalized seedlings and second-, third-, and fourth-generation offspring intermingled with the parent trees.

Floss silk tree, *Chorisia speciosa*. This magnificent specimen, on the grounds of the Bel Air Hotel near UCLA in West Los Angeles, is the largest of its kind in the United States and the single most spectacular flowering tree in California. Exceptional because of its age, size, and beauty, it is 75 feet tall, has a trunk over 12 feet in circumference, and is a breathtaking sight in late summer, when it is covered completely with pink flowers.

Grapefruit, *Citrus* x *paradisi*. This gnarled, venerable tree is a remnant of the first commercial citrus orchard planted in the mid-nineteenth century near what was then the sleepy pueblo of Los Angeles. In spite of the incredible changes and urbanization that have taken place around it, the tree survived for well over 100 years in the section of Los Angeles where Japanese immigrants settled, which became known as Little Tokyo. In 1980, the tree was slated for destruction because of redevelopment in the area. Fortunately, members of the Japanese-American community recognized its significance and led a successful campaign to have it saved; the specimen was moved and replanted in the plaza of the newly built Japanese-American Cultural/Community Center.

Moreton Bay fig, *Ficus macrophylla*. A park in Glendora is the home of the most massive tree located during this project. The tree is close to 100 years of age, is nearly 100 feet tall, and has a crown spread of over 100 feet and a trunk 32 feet in circumference. Exceptional because of its age

and size, it is also noteworthy for its massive root buttresses that spread some distance out from the trunk.

Coast live oak, *Quercus agrifolia*. This huge oak tree in Encino is estimated to be 1000 years old. Its trunk is 24 feet in circumference, and its branches extend more than 125 feet. It was first noted in 1769 by Father Juan Crespi of the Portola Expedition, which was exploring California for the Spanish government. This tree is a registered historical cultural monument of the City of Los Angeles.

Summarizing results

The project leader made presentations to the Southern California Horticulture Institute (1986), the joint International Society of Arboriculture-Western Chapter/Street Tree Seminar meeting (1985), and the University of California Cooperative Extension Statewide Academic Conference (1985), outlining the project and summarizing the results. Audiences responded enthusiastically, showing recognition of the value of the project to the community.

To meet long term-goals of the project, however, additional effort will be needed to (1) develop a publication displaying the results of the project, (2) increase, through educational presentations, community awareness of the value of these exceptional trees to society, and (3) encourage possible legislation mandating protective safeguards for these trees. Through the years, our society has learned to be aware of aspects of its culture and history that need protection for future generations to enjoy. Houses, buildings, bridges, roads, and natural wonders have been deemed worthy of preservation. Because of the importance of trees--their useful and aesthetic value over time--it seems only appropriate that exceptional specimens should also be preserved.

Donald Hodel is Farm Advisor, Los Angeles County Cooperative Extension, University of California.