Chaparral Encyclopedia Article

Chaparral

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Chaparral

Chaparral is an ecological community consisting of drought-resistant evergreen shrubs and small trees that are adapted to long, hot, dry summers and mild, rainy winters. The chaparral is found in five places on earth where there is a warm land mass and a cool ocean: southern California, the Cape Town area of South Africa, the western tip of **Australia**, the west coast of South America, and the coastal areas of the Mediterranean in southern Europe. Total annual precipitation ranges between 15 and 40 inches per year, while annual temperatures range from 50–64.4 °F (10–18 °C). Droughts and fires, which are often set by lightning during the summer/autumn dry season, are common in the chaparral. In fact, because the release of minerals occurs as a result of fire, many chaparral plants grow best after a fire.

The chaparral may have many types of terrain, including flat plains, rocky hills, and mountain slopes. The word chaparral comes from the Spanish word *chaparro*, meaning a dry thicket of oak shrubs.

The plants and animals that live in the chaparral are adapted to the characteristic hot and dry climatic conditions. Most of the plants are less than 10 ft tall and have leathery leaves with thick cuticles that hold moisture. Many of the shrub **flora** are aromatic, contain flammable oils, and are adapted to periodic burns. Examples of chaparral plants include poison oak, scrub oak, pine, manzanita, chamise, yucca, and cacti. The animals are mainly grassland and **desert** types, including coyotes, jack rabbits, mule deer, rattlesnakes, mountain lions, kangaroo rats, foxes, bobcats, lizards, horned toads, praying mantis, honey bees, and ladybugs.

Resources

Books

Collins, Barbara. *Key to Coastal and Chaparral Flowering Plants of Southern California. Third Edition.* Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 2000.

Ricciuti, Edward. R. *Chaparral (Biomes of the World.* Tarrytown, NY: Benchmark Books, 1996.

Other

Collins, Barbara J. *Wildflowers of Southern California: Photographs of the Chaparral.* California Lutheran University, February 23, 2002. [cited May 27, 2002]. <http://ww1.clunet.edu/wf/ E;