

Planting Native Oaks

Selecting a Site

Coast live oaks do well in most parts of Napa County. Valley oaks typically prefer flat areas with a high groundwater table. Black oaks and blue oaks do well on hillsides with relatively dry soils. There should be at least 20' of space between your planting location and the canopies and trunks of other trees, and plant to achieve a mature tree spacing of approximately 20-30'. If livestock are present, acorns, seedlings, and young trees will need protection from trampling and grazing.

Collecting Acorns

Viable acorns are free of insect holes and solid when squeezed. Collect brown acorns from branches if possible; collect when they release easily from the cap. For plantings in Napa County, use acorns collected in Napa County.

To test acorns for viability, put acorns in a bucket of water. Acorns that float are much less likely to germinate. Acorns that sink may be dried and stored in a paper bag in a refrigerator until ready to plant (up to three months).

Acorns ripen in Napa County from late August to late October.

Preparing Your Site & Planting

Clear a 3-5' circle of surface vegetation (unless native plants are present) until you get to mineral soil. Dig into and loosen four inches of soil, and bury three acorns at a depth of 1/2" - 1" deep. If acorns already have sprouted root tips, place the acorn so the root tip is pointed downwards, and be sure not to break root tips. Acorns should be planted horizontally.

Planting acorns should occur before the end of December.

Protecting Plantings

Use a garden stake and plant shelter to protect seedlings from predators. Pound a garden stake into the soil near the acorns deep enough that it will remain firmly in place over the winter. Place a shelter over the acorns and affix to the stake. Shelters can be obtained from Napa County RCD or purchased at garden stores.

Spread 3-6" thick layer of bark mulch around the planting circle to prevent weeds from encroaching upon the seedlings.

Watering & Care

Germination and growth will be observable by end of May (often earlier). Remove weeds around seedlings as soon as possible.

Typically, oaks will receive enough water in a normal winter to sustain themselves throughout the summer; however, supplemental watering can help improve survival during dry months.

