

California's Native Plants Help Hold Up Our Hillsides — But Poachers Threaten Popular Succulents

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January 7, 2023

Climate and Environment

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Published Jan 6, 2023 4:28 PM



A photo of the a dudleya caespitosa at the Regional Parks Botanic Garden in Berkley Hills. The dudleya caespitosa is one of the most common members of the dudleya family of succulents endemic to California.

No California storm reaction video brought me more joy than Jessie Dickson's (aka [sacramentofoodforest](#)) meditation on one of the state's native succulents.

Dickson pans from a swollen dam outside of Sacramento at Natoma Lake to a muddy incline.

"It's eroding like crazy but what's helping it stay up here? Beautiful California native Canyon Dudleya."

In Dickson's video, a few commenters point out it looks as though some large stones are also helping preserve the area's structural integrity.

Dudleya are green succulents with pointed leaves. They look a lot like the common echeveria you'd find at many grocery stores.

But dudleya are special. There are [dozens of species](#)— 26 of them are native to California and 10 are considered threatened or endangered.

"Dudleya are gang," Dickson says. "Nothing is more gang than a plant that holds a wall together."

While he wouldn't use the word "gang," California Native Plant Society Conservation Director Nick Jensen says the video is right.

The roots of native plants [can hold soil in place](#).

"If you remove dudleya or if you remove other plants... you can have erosion which otherwise essentially destroys the habitat," Jensen said. Dudleya are also an important source of food for pollinators like hummingbirds and bees.

Dudleya Need Protection

Development threatens many native plants, but succulents' trendiness and colorful flowers mean dudleya face a unique threat — poaching.

In recent years, people have uprooted the California dudleya and [sold them overseas](#) — sometimes for hundreds of dollars.

The California Native Plant Society sponsored a bill passed in 2021 that [increases the penalties for dudleya poaching](#). Assembly Bill 223 makes it a misdemeanor to sell a plant that was taken from public or private land without permission. The fine for selling at least \$250 worth of the plant starts at \$5,000.

Jensen says the law is only part of the solution.

“One of the things that people can always do to promote the conservation of native species is just appreciate them in their native habitat,” Jensen said. Take note of where you see dudleya in the wild — and if you notice them being disturbed, contact law enforcement or the California Native Plant Society, Jensen said.

Know Where Your Dudleya Is From

You can also enjoy dudleya much closer to home.

“Everyone should have a few dudleya on their patio,” Jensen says. He has several including the Dudleya pulverulenta — which has icy blue-green leaves and sprouts pinkish rosy-red flowers beloved by hummingbirds.

Dudleya are easy to grow and propagate and often sold by native plant nurseries like the Theodore Payne Foundation in Sun Valley and Plant-Material in Altadena, Glassell Park, and Silver Lake.

“Make sure that that they know the source of their plants,” Jensen said. “So you're not inadvertently buying a plant that was plucked from the wild.”