

State of California Symbols & Emblems

California: The name California is believed to have come from a 16th-century Spanish novel about a mythical land inhabited by Amazons and ruled by the beautiful black queen Calafia. The first official mention of California was a July 2, 1542, entry in the diary of Juan Cabrillo as his ship lay at anchor off the coast of Baja California. The term was later applied to Alta California, which became the present State of California, on September 9, 1850.

The Great Seal: Its design was adopted at the Constitutional Convention of 1848. Under thirty-one stars, Minerva, Roman goddess of arts, sciences, and wisdom in war and peace, keeps watch over a tableau depicting industry, commerce, agriculture, mining, and the grandeur of nature. Like the political birth of California, Minerva was born full-grown from the brain of Jupiter, father of the gods and guardian of law and order. The grizzly bear at her feet, independent and formidable, symbolizes California.

State Amphibian: The California red-legged frog, perhaps best known for its probable appearance in Mark Twain's short story "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," the California red-legged frog (*Rana draytonii*) is the largest native frog in the western United States and is almost exclusive to California.

State Animal: The California Grizzly Bear, depicted on the Great Seal and the State Flag, became the official State Animal in 1953. Now extinct, the California Grizzly Bear was a particularly large, fierce, and powerful animal that thrived in the great valleys and low mountains of the state. The last living specimen was shot in Tulare County in 1922. A bear frequently symbolizes California in political cartoons.

State Bat: The *Antrozous pallidus*, or the pallid bat, is the official state bat of California. This species of bats is as "diverse as Californians" and is a natural pest control for California's agriculture.

State Bird: The California Quail, also known as the valley quail, became the official State Bird in 1931. Plump, gray-colored, and smaller than a pigeon, the California quail has a downward-curving black plume on top of its head and a black bib with a white stripe under its beak. They are known for their hardiness and adaptability.

State Colors: The official colors of the state are blue and gold, Yale Blue and Golden Yellow. These are also the colors of the University of California.

State Dance and Folk Dance: West Coast Swing Dancing is the State Dance. It originated in California and is danced in competition nationally and internationally. The Square Dance is the official State Folk Dance.

State Dinosaur: *Augustynolophus Morrisi* (as-gus-tine-o-LOAF-us-MORE-is-se-ee) roamed California approximately 72.1 million to 66 million years ago. California is the only place where two fossil specimens of this dinosaur have ever been found: Fresno County (1939) and San Benito County (1941). *A. morrisi*, a member of the hadrosaur family, was approximately 26 feet long, weighed approximately 3 tons, and was a vegetarian.

State Fabric: Denim was introduced to American mills in the 18th century and later became a staple during the California Gold Rush. The fabric was jointly patented in 1873 by San Francisco dry goods merchant Levi Strauss (1830-1902) and Nevadan tailor Jacob Davis (1832-1908). The fabric became popular among miners, farmers, and workers.

State Fife and Drum Band: The California Consolidated Drum Band was designated as the official State Fife and Drum Corps in 1997.

State Fish: The California Golden Trout is native to no other state and became the official State Fish in 1947. Closely related to the rainbow trout, it was originally found only in the icy streams of the Kern Plateau in the southern Sierra Nevada, south of Mount Whitney.

State Flag: The Bear Flag was raised on June 14, 1846, by American settlers in Sonoma during an uprising against the Mexican government. Although the so-called "California Republic" was short-lived, its flag became a romantic symbol of independence and was adopted as the State Flag by the Legislature in 1911.

State Flower: The Golden Poppy, which can be found blooming somewhere in California during every part of the year, became the State Flower in 1903. April 6 is designated *California Poppy Day*. California Indians valued the poppy as a food source and for the oil extracted from the plant. Also known as the flame flower, the poppy grows wild throughout California.

State Fossil: The Saber-Toothed Tiger, adopted as State Fossil by the Legislature in 1973, was a powerful, tiger-sized carnivore with 8-inch fangs. Common in California 40 million years ago, it hunted thick-skinned animals such as mastodons.

State Freshwater Fish: California's state freshwater fish, the California Golden Trout, is native to California's southern Sierra Nevada Mountains. They live at 6-10,000 feet elevation in clear, cold water at 37-71 F°. Golden trout are one of the most beautiful and colorful of the trout family.

State Gemstone: Benitoite was designated as the official State Gemstone in 1985. It is sometimes called the "blue diamond."

State Gold Rush Ghost Town: Bodie, in Mono County, was designated the official State Gold Rush Ghost Town by the Legislature in 2001.

State Grass: In 2004, *Nassella Pulchra* or Purple Needlegrass, as it is commonly known, was designated the State Grass. It is the most extensive and widespread native perennial bunchgrass found in the state, with a range extending from the Oregon border into northern Baja California. It is a symbol of the heritage, splendor, and natural diversity found in the early days of California.

State Historical Society: Established in 1871, the California Historical Society was designated as the official California State Historical Society in 1979. Headquartered in San Francisco with a library and museum, the Society collects, preserves, and exhibits materials about the history of California and the West. The Society also has a large collection of art that depicts the history of California. In addition to its library and museum function, it also offers lectures, family and school programs, and other activities on a scheduled basis.

State Holiday: California designated April 6 as *California Poppy Day* in 2010, and Governor Wilson proclaimed May 13-18 as *Poppy Week* in 1996. On California Poppy Day, all public schools and educational institutions are encouraged to conduct exercises honoring the California Poppy, including instruction about native plants, particularly the California Poppy, and the economic and aesthetic value of wildflowers; promoting responsible behavior toward our natural resources and a spirit of protection toward them; and emphasizing the value of natural resources and conservation of natural resources.

State Insect: The California Dog-face Butterfly, found nowhere outside this state, became the State Insect in 1972. Its wings are an iridescent bluish-black, orange, and sulfur-yellow in color.

State Lichen: Lace lichen (*Ramalina menziesii*) is a common sight throughout much of California. Like other lichens, it is formed from a partnership between algae and fungus. Lace lichen hangs from oaks and other trees and shrubs in netlike strands several feet long and does not harm its hosts. It is extremely susceptible to air pollution, so the health and presence or absence of lace lichen can be used as an indicator of air quality. Animals use it for food and nesting material.

State Marine Fish: In 1995, the Legislature acted to protect the Garibaldi by placing a moratorium on commercial collection until the year 2002; it was also named the official State Marine Fish at that time.

State Marine Mammal: The California Gray Whale was designated the State Marine Mammal in 1975; specimens can grow 30 to 50 feet long and weigh up to 40 tons.

State Marine Reptile: The Pacific leatherback sea turtle is the largest and deepest diving of all sea turtles. The leatherback acquired its common name because its shell is made of small bones covered by a layer of rubbery skin. The turtle is black with white and pink spotting.

State Military Museum: In 2004, the California State Military Museum and Resource Center was the official state military museum.

State Mineral: Native Gold is the official State Mineral and was so designated in 1965. This state has produced more gold than any other in the Union, and it can still be panned in California's streambeds.

State Motto: "*Eureka*" appears on the Great Seal of the State. It is a Greek word meaning, *I have found it*,

referring originally to the discovery of gold. "Eureka" was made the official State Motto in 1963.

State Mushroom: *Cantharellus californicus*, also known as the California golden chanterelle, is the state mushroom due to its popularity. The commonly collected edible mushroom, with a slightly fruity apricot scent and a nutty flavor when cooked with butter is long been loved by Californians. Recognition of a state mushroom honors and helps increase awareness and appreciation of the natural world. New species are being discovered, even as many others are threatened by habitat loss, climate change, and other factors. The mushroom highlights the nourishment of our forests and grasslands, which is done through extensive belowground networks and symbiotic connections with plant roots.

State Nickname: "The Golden State" has long been a popular designation for California and was made the official State Nickname in 1968. It is particularly appropriate since California's modern development can be traced back to the discovery of gold in 1848, and fields of golden poppies can be seen each spring throughout the state.

State Nuts: Almond, walnut, pistachio, and pecan are the official State Nuts, which are crucial to the economy of California. The state grows approximately 80% of the world's almonds, 75% of the world's walnuts, and 98% of pistachios in the United States. Pecans are the only state nut that is native to California.

State Outdoor Play: California designated the Ramona Pageant as the official state outdoor play in 1993. The Ramona Pageant is an outdoor play staged each year in Hemet, California, since 1923. The script for the play is adapted from the 1884 novel by *Ramona* by Helen Hunt Jackson. The outdoor play is held over three consecutive weekends in April and May in the Ramona Bowl, a natural amphitheater in the foothills above Hemet in Riverside County. The production features a cast of more than 300, made up largely of residents and amateur actors.

State Pet: California designated "a shelter pet" as the official state pet in 2015. There are currently around eight million abandoned pets living in animal shelters in the United States; three to four million of these dogs are euthanized every year; the Legislature seeks to raise public awareness of shelter animals; and hereby declares a shelter pet as the official State Pet.

State Prehistoric Artifact: Perhaps the most unusual state symbol is the State Prehistoric Artifact, the Chipped Stone Bear. Discovered at an archaeological dig site in San Diego County in 1985, and resembling a walking bear, this 7,000-8,000-year-old object was designated a state symbol in 1991, making California the first state to designate an official State Prehistoric Artifact.

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State Quarter: The California Quarter was issued on January 31, 2005, by the United States Mint. The California Quarter, part of the United States Mint's 50 State Quarters Program, was the 31st state quarter released by the Mint because California, admitted into the Union on September 9, 1850, is our nation's 31st state. The California Quarter depicts naturalist and conservationist John Muir admiring Yosemite Valley's monolithic Half Dome while a California condor soars overhead. The coin bears the inscriptions "California," "John Muir," "Yosemite Valley," and "1850."

State Reptile: The Desert Tortoise digs a deep burrow that it peaceably shares with owls and rattlesnakes. Related to the giant Galapagos tortoise, it is vegetarian and, if not removed from its desert habitat, very long-lived. The tortoise has been the official State Reptile since 1972 and is protected as an endangered species.

State Rock: In 1965, Serpentine, a blue or green-colored stone, was adopted by the Legislature as the official State Rock.

State Seal: The Great Seal of the State of California was adopted by the Constitutional Convention of 1849. California's seal has 31 stars on the upper edge that represent the number of states that existed upon California's admission to the United States in 1850. A grizzly bear feeding on grape vines next to a sheaf of grain represents the abundant wildlife and agricultural richness of California, particularly California's wine production industry (the extinct California grizzly is the official state animal and also appears on the California state flag).

State Silver Rush Ghost Town: In 2005, Calico was the official state silver rush ghost town.

State Soil: The San Joaquin Soil was designated as the official State Soil in 1997. The designation commemorates the completion of the state's most comprehensive soil inventory and acknowledges the importance of soil.

State Song: "I Love You, California," lyrics by F. B. Silverwood and music by A.F. Frankenstein of Los Angeles, was first sung publicly by Mary Garden in 1913. In 1951, the State Legislature passed a resolution declaring it California's state song: *I Love You, California* officially became the State Song by law in 1988.
I Love You, California

I.

*I love you, California, you're the greatest state of all.
I love you in the winter, summer, spring and in the fall.
I love your fertile valleys; your dear mountains I adore.
I love your grand old ocean and I love her rugged shore.*

Chorus

*Where the snow crowned Golden Sierras
Keep their watch o'er the valleys bloom,
It is there I would be in our land by the sea,
Every breeze bearing rich perfume.
It is here nature gives of her rarest.
It is Home Sweet Home to me,
And I know when I die I shall breathe my last sigh
For my sunny California.*

II.

*I love your red-wood forests -- love your fields of yellow grain.
I love your summer breezes and I love your winter rain.
I love you, land of flowers; land of honey, fruit and wine.
I love you, California; you have won this heart of mine.*

III.

*I love your old gray Missions -- love your vineyards stretching far.
I love you, California, with your Golden Gate ajar.
I love your purple sun-sets, love your skies of azure blue.
I love you, California; I just can't help loving you.*

IV.

*I love you, Catalina, you are very dear to me.
I love you, Tamalpais, and I love Yosemite.
I love you, Land of Sunshine, Half your beauties are untold.*

I loved you in my childhood, and I'll love you when I'm old.

State Sport: In 2018, California established surfing as the official state sport. California is home to several world-famous surf breaks like Malibu, Trestles, Mavericks, Rincon, Steamer Lane, and Huntington, which are destinations for both domestic and international surfers. It is important to remember that California's coastline is not only home to these surf breaks but is also the ancestral homeland to indigenous peoples. These indigenous people continue to live in these ancestral homelands today and have embraced the sport of surfing in these areas. Every year, California surf breaks host numerous domestic and international surf events, including the International Surf Festival in the Cities of Hermosa Beach, Manhattan Beach, Redondo Beach, and Torrance, the U.S. Open of Surfing in Huntington Beach, the Mavericks Big Wave Surf Contest in Half Moon Bay, and the Founders' Cup of Surfing in Lemoore.

State Tall Ship: "The Californian" was established as the official state tall ship in 2003. Currently housed in the San Diego Maritime Museum, the *Californian* is a full-scale reproduction of the 1848 Revenue Cutter Lawrence. She is 145 feet long with a beam of 27 feet and a draft of 9.5 feet. With all sails flying, she carries 7,000 square feet of sail.

State Shrub: The Bigberry Manzanita (*Arctostaphylos glauca*) was designated as the official state shrub in 2025 through Assembly Bill 581, authored by Assemblymember Steve Bennett. Native almost exclusively to California, the bigberry manzanita is uniquely adapted to the state's wildfire-prone landscapes. It can rapidly regenerate after fire exposure, and its seeds germinate in response to fire. With an extensive root system that stabilizes soil and prevents erosion, the bigberry manzanita thrives in dry, nutrient-poor conditions, helping to reduce the risk of mudslides and landslides in post-wildfire areas.

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State Snake: The giant garter snake (*Thamnophis gigas*) was formally added to official state symbols in 2025 under Senate Bill 765, authored by Senator Roger Niello. This species is endemic to California, occurring only in the Central Valley. Over the past century, its numbers have plummeted the population has declined by more than 90%. It was first listed as threatened by the state in 1971, and later under the federal Endangered Species Act in 1993.

State Tartan: In 2001, California adopted a Scottish symbol of courage in the face of adversity with the designation of the official State Tartan. Based on the family tartan of John Muir, the pattern of Pacific blue and meadow green with charcoal bands plus red, gold, and blue seams may be claimed and worn by any resident of the state.

State Theater: The Pasadena Playhouse was made the official State Theater of California in 1937 and later became the first TV station on the West Coast. Closed in 1969, the Pasadena Theater would reopen in 1986. The Pasadena Playhouse, as the theater is known today, is a California Historical Landmark.

State Tree: The California Redwood became the official State Tree in 1937. Once common throughout the northern hemisphere, redwoods are now found only near the Pacific Coast. There actually are two species of California redwood, the Coast Redwood and the Giant Sequoia, that are among the most ancient and awesome living things. The Giant Sequoia is the most massive tree in the world, with 30-foot diameter trunks and ages of over 3,000 years. The Coast Redwood is the tallest tree in the world, with specimens exceeding 300 feet in height, and living to be 2,200 years old.

State Vietnam Veterans Memorial:

Dedicated in 1988, the California Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Sacramento's Capitol Park commemorates the 5,822 Californians who died or went missing in action while serving in the Vietnam War. In total, more than 350,000 Californians served in the war.

State LGBTQ Veterans Memorial: This is the first official memorial of its type to be dedicated in the United States. The LGBTQ Memorial was created in 2018 by Assembly Bill 2439, Chapter 172, which was passed by the California Legislature and signed by Governor Jerry Brown that same year. The LGBTQ Veterans Memorial is located at Desert Memorial Park, 31705 Da Vall Drive, Cathedral City, CA 92234.