

Fennel on Santa Cruz Island

✿ Fennel is a strikingly aromatic plant, resembling anise and licorice in both scent and taste.

A member of the same plant family as parsley, cilantro and dill, fennel has historically been used as flavoring in foods, a scent for perfumes, and in medicines.

✿ Native to southern Europe and Asia Minor, fennel has been extremely successful in spreading to most parts of the world as a weed; California is no exception.

Often, it invades where ground has been disturbed, and is commonly found along roadways and in vacant lots throughout the state.

✿ On Santa Cruz Island, fennel has aggressively invaded and become the dominant cover type on thousands of island acres.

As a result of the island-wide disturbance caused by over 150 years of ranching and agricultural operations, this aggressive and dominant weed is now threatening endemic plant communities. Forming extremely dense and prolific stands that tower over eight feet in height, fennel not only destroys intact native plants, it provides great cover for Santa Cruz Island's most destructive animal, the feral pig, allowing it to proliferate. This unholy alliance is further exacerbated by the pigs' ability to disturb soils creating an ideal seedbed, so that fennel may continue its invasion.

✿ Fennel is a tremendous problem on Santa Cruz and greatly inhibits efforts to rid the island of feral pigs, thereby sentencing the island to continued destruction.

Extensive research has been done to assess the biology and invasive characteristics of fennel. This research, conducted largely by University of California and other plant ecology and weed experts, has provided invaluable insight into not only how the plant works, but how to control it. A pilot project was initiated in the island's central valley in an attempt to reduce – and ultimately eradicate – a notoriously dense stand of over 500 acres of fennel. This study has been a success and serves as a model for controlling fennel on the island.

✿ To ensure success, it is imperative that aggressive steps be taken to control fennel on Santa Cruz Island, and that it be done in tandem with efforts to eliminate feral pigs from this unique ecosystem.



*Fennel in bloom.
Because of the many flowers,
fennel produces an astonishing
amount of seed each year,
allowing it to invade easier.*