

# Desert plant could bolster world's supply of natural rubber

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Tropical plantations in Southeast Asia have supplied most of the essential, natural rubber for truck, car and airplane tires for the past century. Now the tire industry and others say they're finally overcoming long-standing challenges to turn a desert shrub into an alternative source of the stretchy material. An article in *Chemical & Engineering News* (C&EN) explains that the latest developments will help diversify an otherwise vulnerable supply chain.

Alexander Tullo, a senior correspondent at C&EN, explains that natural rubber has unique properties that make it ideal for use in tires. But as dependable as natural rubber is, its supply is not. It mostly comes from one region, where weather, political instability, pests, disease or other factors can interrupt its flow to the global market. To ensure a steadier supply of [natural rubber](#), researchers have long sought ways to extract it economically from a plant called guayule that's native to the southwestern U.S. Their efforts may soon pay off.

Scientists now know how to coax out the rubber trapped in the plant's cells. And manufacturers have already incorporated it in latex products as well as a popular wetsuit. Tire companies seem poised to benefit next though cost is still a concern. They are testing the crop in different arid locations around the world and expect to ramp up production in coming years.

**More information:** Guayule Gets Ready to Hit the Road - [cen.acs.org/articles/93/i16/Gu ... -Ready-Hit-Road.html](http://cen.acs.org/articles/93/i16/Gu...-Ready-Hit-Road.html)

Provided by American Chemical Society

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