

Hints on Growing Native Plants

By Mary Anderson

Mother Nature is once again pulling out the stops this spring, clothing the fields and woodlands in blooms. It looks so easy, but trying to duplicate her show in the garden is often challenging. With a little understanding of the special requirements of natives, we can have more success.

The secret to getting natives from dry environments—like ceanothus, flannel bush, toyon, and silverbush lupine—established is to ensure that they have excellent drainage in the native soil. Planting on a slope, or creating a mound helps, as does adding fine to medium gravel to the planting hole (soil amendments are not recommended for most native plants). While we need to water the young plants at first, if the roots are in soggy, heavy soil in the heat of summer, they often rot. A cooling mulch is also beneficial.

On the other hand, plants from riparian settings like snowberry, redbud dogwood, western azalea and wild mock orange, and woodland perennials like columbine, fringe cups, and leopard lily are much more tolerant of garden conditions. They appreciate soils amended with compost or humus and regular summer water. They also require some protection from the heat of long summer days. Plant them on a north or east exposure or where they will get afternoon shade.

A great way to get a patch of wildflowers like Chinese houses, California poppy or bush lupine to naturalize is to start with a 'mother plant'. Allow her to go to seed and the seeds will germinate at the correct time next fall. By eliminating competition and crowding by weeds, your favorite wildflowers will have a better chance of getting started.

I've had excellent success getting a large patch of soaproot, a tall dry-land lily, growing outside my kitchen window by declaring it off limits to the weedeater and doing a little hand weeding around it. Pulling some weeds from a patch of shooting stars has allowed them to spread, along with their buttercup friends!

Here is your chance to purchase native plants from the California Native Plant Society at their upcoming sale:

California Native Plant Sale – April 8

To learn more about growing native plants and to purchase some fine specimens join us when the Sierra Foothills Chapter of the California Native Plant Society holds their spring Native Plant Sale on Saturday, April 8th from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. in San Andreas, rain or shine! The location is Calaveras County Water District (CCWD) located off of Pool Station Road in the Reed Business Park, in San Andreas.

Directions to the Calaveras County Water District Building at 120 Toma Court, San Andreas: Take HWY 49 to San Andreas. Turn left onto Pool Station Road, and go 2 miles; turn left on George Reed Road. Turn left on Toma Court. CCWD is on the corner of George Reed and Toma Court. Come early for the best selections.

In addition, the Sierra Rock Garden Society will have its annual plant sale, offering many unique plants especially suited to foothill gardens. Plants offered will range from rock garden plants to trees! Prices will please. Sale profits support their free international speaker events that are open to the public. The sale will be held Wednesday, April 12, 2017, 11 am to 3:00 pm at The Farmory at the Armory, 10800 Airport Road, Columbia.

Mary Anderson, retired owner of Lost Hills Nursery, has spent the last 30 years getting to know California native plants on her 10-acre property and propagates many native plants from the seeds of her 'mother plants'. She is one of the original members of the Sierra Foothills Chapter of the California Native Plant Society.