



Drought tolerant but bright, bold and beautiful!

by Patty Weeks, UC Master Gardener

Rearranging an established garden can be a daunting but exciting project. In the Master Gardener demonstration garden along Mill Creek at West Main and Fairway in Visalia we recently removed a section of Rush plants which were blocking a sprinkler and the view into the garden. We are left with a 5 by 13 foot area with only a California native buckwheat plant with white flowers and lacy green leaves.

Many people think of a drought tolerant garden as brown and blah. Our goal is to show a wide range of native and drought tolerant plants with differing flower colors, leaf textures and eye appeal. We also want to have good structure in the garden year round. With these criteria in mind we've been working on a new design.

To make a bold statement in the center of this area, we selected Butterfly Bush "Black Knight" (*Buddleja davidii*), a fast growing, semi-evergreen shrub with tapered dark green leaves and small deep purple flowers borne in grape-shaped clusters at the end of the branches throughout summer. This shrub which grows 5-6 feet tall will create height. Because it is tall and airy, everyone can see through it to the rest of the garden from the street and it won't block the sprinkler.



"Black Knight"
Butterfly Bush

Next we decided upon some mid-size plants which grow no larger than 3 by 3 feet since our space is only 5 feet wide. We will place these perennials along the 13 foot length of our planting area staggered a bit off-center in a wave-like pattern to create movement through the garden. We'll also use an interesting variety of color and leaf textures.



"Hot Lips" Salvia

One selection is a red salvia (*Salvia greggii*) "Hot Lips" that we propagated from another garden that we planted years ago. This lovely rounded sage has slender hairy stems with veined leaves, blooms from spring through fall and sports two-toned red and white tubular blossoms (hence the name hot lips). Hummingbirds love it! It can grow to 4 feet high and wide but is easily trimmed back in early spring to keep it bushy. Its fragrance is wonderful!

We'll also add a blue salvia called "May Night" which has a large rosette of basal leaves and dark blue flower spikes

reaching 18 inches tall. This plant blooms all summer with monthly deadheading and is especially beautiful in front of the existing buckwheat along with our next two selections.

While shopping at the COS Horticulture Department on Linwood, we found "Apricot Delight" yarrow (Achillea millefolium), a wonderful carefree plant with feathery green leaves all year and peach colored flat flower clusters shooting up in summer and early fall. Once established, yarrow will endure drought and only requires occasional trimming of spent blossoms to keep the color on-going through the summer. We will also add "Moonshine" yarrow, a variety with silvery green leaves and yellow blooms.



"Apricot Delight" Yarrow

To contrast with the airy plants we added red geraniums (*Pelargonium spp.*). With rounded slightly ruffled leaves and large red flowers, the geranium provides a textural change and a solid base in the garden. Iris is planted behind the geranium and their sword-like leaves and showy spring blossoms add even more structure to the garden.

Another new introduction is "Chocolate" coral bells (*Heuchera* hybrids), which reminds me of a box of candy with mocha, light and dark chocolate, and coffee colored leaves.

The native Valley oak trees here provide some afternoon shade and protection from our hot summer sun. The shade will also cut down our water usage. But one of the best ways of water control is to use a thick layer of mulch over the ground after planting. A tree service donated a rich pile of tree shavings a couple of years ago and this pile now has a wonderful crumbly texture that will be just right for top dressing the soil around our new plants.

Budget was an issue so we looked for economical ways to acquire the plants. We only spent \$11 for new plant purchases. Plant swaps with friends, division of existing plants, and propagating from stem cuttings really kept the cost down. We are hosting a hands-on **plant division and stem cutting propagation** demonstration for the public on September 22 at this garden site, so you can learn how to multiply plants for your own garden. Come on by between 9am and noon!

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