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Native Plants, Schmative Plants - What's All the Fuss?
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Well, actually, it's pretty big. Yes, correctly chosen native plants in our garden saves water, money, and time in the long run. But an even bigger story is gardens of natives can actually help our wonderful foothill home, and all the plants and animals we share it with. It's our chance to make a difference, all in the green shadiness of our yards!

Consider birds and other critters you enjoy watching: they are part of a complex food web that all stems from insects, especially caterpillars, and the plants those caterpillars need to survive.

And what plants are those? Mostly natives. These are the plants that have coexisted with these caterpillars for eons and they are adapted to each other; with their timing, composition of leaves, and so on.

As adults, butterflies and moths are often generalists and you can enjoy these lovely critters eating nectar from many different flower sources. But as caterpillars, they tend to be much more specific. You will not see Monarch butterflies, if there are no milkweed plants for the caterpillars; you will not see Pipevine swallowtails, unless there are Dutchman Pipevine plants for their caterpillars; and you will not see any butterflies or moths unless their caterpillar host plants are available nearby.

Caterpillars are a critical food source to 96 percent of all young birds, including seed eaters... and so the food web goes. Native plants at the bottom, eaten by insects, eaten by birds, foxes, and frogs, which are eaten by bobcats, which die and are eaten by beetles and fungi, which feed the soil, which feed the plants.

Where do we come in? The natural world has been sorely fragmented even here in the foothills by houses and businesses, roads and highways, introductions of invasive alien plants, feral cats, and more. By planting a variety of native plants in our backyards we can help that complex web perform. A network of gardens with native plants can act as critical corridors between fragmented areas of habitat, according to research done by Dr. Doug Tallamy, Chair of

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Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware, and a renowned expert in the field of plant-insect interactions.

The variety and beauty of our Sierra foothill native plants often astonishes people. Standard nurseries unfortunately may carry just a handful of species, generally ones that do well in pots. But there are so many, many more! Seek out nurseries that specialize in natives, or visit the Master Gardener Fall Plant sale which will include native plants and more, on September 24 at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. You can also visit the local chapter of the California Native Plant Society's plant sale on October 1, which will gather several native plant nurseries at Government Building C (below the Placerville library).

For all the native plants of your particular area, visit www.calscapes.org. Once you enter your address, you can see and learn about the many plants that could typically grow in your particular neighborhood.

To learn more about the importance of native plant gardening, read Dr. Tallamy's book *Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants*, found in our local library. To see which local species are particularly important for caterpillars, visit the National Wildlife Federation's Native Plant Finder on the web.

To see what a foothill native plant garden can look like, visit the Sherwood Demonstration Garden's Native Plant Garden this month on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. This is the second year of establishment for most of the plants and they will need very little supplemental water next summer. Visit again in spring and early summer for peak blooms!

For more on how to choose, plant and care for a native garden, come to the free UCCE Master Gardener class Successful Gardening with Flowering Native Plants on September 17 from 9:00 a.m. to noon at Folsom Lake College - El Dorado Center, 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville. After a classroom presentation, the class will visit the adjacent Sherwood Demonstration Garden to see Native plants in action, as well as learning the successes and failures, how plantings were organized, and water management. Hopefully you will then be well on your way toward knowing how to create your own successful native garden!

Another free Master Gardener class on Seed Saving and Garden Journaling will be held Sept 17 from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. at Folsom Lake College and the Sherwood Demonstration Garden. Learn about recording your garden's progress for future successes, and how to collect your favorite plant seeds to grow beautiful plants for little cost. Free seeds will be available for attendees!

Today, Sept 14 is a free Master Gardener class, Putting Your Garden to Bed, 9:00 a.m. to noon at Cameron Park Community Center, 2502 Country Club Drive in Cameron Park. The extra effort in your yard this fall will pay big dividends next year; learn about yard and garden clean up, cool season planting, tool sharpening and cleaning, composting, mulching, and pruning.

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at

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our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at [http://ucanr.edu/master gardener e-news](http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news). You can also find us on Facebook.