Outstanding Plants for Alameda County

Attractive Plants that Thrive on Little Care

As Master Gardeners, we are often asked to recommend plants that grow well in Alameda County. In addition, many gardeners want to conserve water, reduce pesticide usage, and attract wildlife to their gardens. They also desire plants that don’t require a lot of special care. Fortunately, there are many wonderful plants that can help gardeners meet these goals while providing color and interest in the garden.

This pamphlet highlights a selection of those plants. Some are single species, while others listed are genera of plants with species ranging from ground covers to large shrubs. For the latter, we have recommended some species and varieties within the genus as a starting point, though there are many others that will perform well and look beautiful. Reassuringly, the plants included here are those with which Master Gardeners in Alameda County have had positive experiences. Always check the label of the plant you are buying for its final size as well as its growing conditions (i.e., water, sun, and care requirements).

When planting, bear in mind that Alameda County contains many climatic zones or “micro-climates,” so a plant that tolerates full sun in coastal Berkeley may require afternoon shade in Livermore. Similarly, plants that need no summer water in San Leandro, might benefit from an occasional deep soaking in Pleasanton. Although this brochure notes general growing conditions with each plant description, you will achieve best results if you learn about your own micro-climate and consult with your local nursery.

California Lilac
Ceanothus spp.

Mounding evergreen. Groundcover, large shrub or tree. With profuse clusters of tiny blue flowers in spring. Thrives on neglect. Afternoon shade inland. Suggested varieties: C. griseus horizontalis (groundcover); ‘Joyce Coulter’ (low shrub); Julia Phelps’ (medium to large shrub), ‘Ray Hartman’ (large shrub/small tree). Other: Good drainage. Little to no summer water. Small-leaved varieties deer resistant. Attracts butterflies and hummingbirds.

Currant or Gooseberry
Ribes sanguineum, R. aereum (inland)


Coffeeberry
Rhamus californica

Groundcover to large shrub depending on variety. Attractive dark green foliage with berries. Spring to late fall, turning from green to red to black as they mature. Inconspicuous flowers. Suggested varieties: ‘Eve Case’ (small shrub form with large berries); ‘Seasame Improved’ (groundcover); ‘Mound San Bruno’ (very adaptable larger shrub). Other: Prefers good drainage. Some summer water inland. Habit of plant for birds.

Grevillea
Grevillea spp.

Australian native. Range from small, prostrate species to trees - select with care. Terrific lobed or needlelike leaves. Red, orange, pink, white or yellow flowers in winter and spring. Tolerates heat, poor soil, and little or no water. Suggested: G. lanigera (medium to large shrub, hairy leaves, pink flowers); G. lavandulacea (medium shrub, needlelike leaves, rose-red flowers); G. rosea (large shrub, prickly leaves, red flowers). Other: Good drainage. Hummingbirds love.

Oregon Grape
Mahonia aquifolium, M. platycarpa, M. repens

Erect medium to large evergreen shrub with dark green spiny leaves - bronzy when new - red to purple in fall. Small yellow blooms in early spring followed by edible blue-black fruit. Excellent understory plant. Suggested varieties: ‘Compacta’ (lower, wider growth); ‘Golden Abundance’; Other: All soil types. Prefers shade in hottest climates. Attracts birds. Good for large containers.

Mexican Bush Sage
Salvia leucantha

Attractive and reliable shrub grown as a perennial in colder regions where severe frost causes seasonal dieback. Mounding green grey foliage grows 2-4’, Purple flower spikes bloom fall through spring. Trim to ground level in late winter to prevent excessive woodiness. Suggested varieties: ‘Midnight’, ‘Santa Barbara’ (compact). Other: Likes part shade and occasional summer water inland. Attracts hummingbirds.

Mimulus aurantiacus
Shrubby Monkeyflower


Salvia leucantha

Large, fast growing subshrub perennial with gray green maple-like leaves. Long blooming purple-pink flowers with contrasting centers. Grows to 6’ in one season. Suggested: S. assurgentiflora (natives darker blooms with white centers); S. martinea (light pink flowers with magenta centers). Other: Any soil. Attracts butterflies and larva, hummingbirds, and bees. Prune to promote flowers and dense growth.
**Perennials**

### Hummingbird Sage
**Salvia spathacea**
Fragrant herbaceous perennial with numerous long-stemmed flower clusters and ground-covering foliage. Blooms late winter through summer. Suggested varieties: "Liquorice" and 'Dr. Salter's hybrids' (deciduous); 'A. aurea' hybrids (evergreen). Other: Good drainage. Attracts hummingbirds and butterflies.

### California Fuchsia
**Epilobium canum, E. septentrionale** (also known as Zauschneria)
Low-growing perennial, spreading by rhizomes. Forms attractive clumps of silver gray or gray-green leaves. Clusters of brilliant red-orange flowers in late summer and fall. Little maintenance; just cut back stems after blooming for new growth the following spring. Other: Good drainage. Tolerates heat. Attracts hummingbirds and native bees.

### Lavender
**Lavandula spp.**

### New Zealand Flax
**Phormium tenax and hybrids**
Valued for foliage and structure. Large, sword-shaped leaves in varying lengths of bronze, red, variegated greens, and yellow. Color intensifies with full sun and cool weather. Occasional large red or yellow spiky blooms in late spring/summer. Suggested: 'Jack Spratt' (small reddish dark green), 'Maori Chief' (large green, edged with crimson and cream), 'Variegatum' (large, gray/green with yellow and cream stripes). Other: Hybrids require more water inland.

### Pineapple Sage
**Salvia elegans**
Clumping perennial growing to 4’ with spikes of long, tubular red flowers in winter and spring. Foliage smells like pineapple and is used to make tea. Spreads slowly by underground runners. To maintain shape and productivity, cut back older stems as new growth appears. Excellent winter food source for hummingbirds. Other: Good drainage. Frost can cause die-back but mature plants will recover.