



Gardening with California Native Plants



UC Master Gardeners of Mariposa County

Biodiversity hotspots are regions of the world that experience extreme biological diversity and concurrently struggle under the threat of extreme habitat loss. Thirty-five locations in the world have been identified, mostly in tropical forests. These locations make up 2.3% of the world's landscape but house 50% of the world's endemic plant species and 42% of all terrestrial vertebrates. California is the only identified hotspot in North America. It's nearly 7,000 native plant species reflect the natural splendor and beauty of our surrounding areas. Yet, with habitat loss, these native plants are slowly disappearing from our landscape.

Native plants have several major advantages for California gardeners. First, they save water in a drought-prone land. California's Mediterranean climate is characterized by long, hot, dry summers and cool, mild winters. Once established, many California native plants need minimal irrigation beyond normal winter rains.

No landscape is completely free of maintenance, especially in the foothills where defensible space is necessary to prevent damage from frequent wildfire. However, California native plants tend to require less time and resources than common landscape plants. They rarely require fertilizer, extra watering on hot days or excessive pruning. In addition, California natives tolerate the variety of soils commonly found in the Sierra Nevada foothills.

California natives have developed their own defenses against many pests and diseases. Since many pesticides kill indiscriminately, beneficial insects often

become secondary targets. By reducing or eliminating pesticide use, gardeners can keep garden toxins out of our creeks and watersheds as well.

Native plants, hummingbirds, butterflies, and beneficial insects are “made for each other.” Research shows that native wildlife clearly prefers native plants. California’s wealth of insect pollinators can improve fruit set in your garden, while a variety of native insects and birds will help keep your landscape free of mosquitoes and plant-eating bugs.

As development replaces natural habitats, planting gardens, parks, and roadsides with California native plants can help provide an important “bridge” to nearby remaining wildlands. California natives can also be an inexpensive way to landscape your property.

UC Master Gardeners of Mariposa County are located at 5009 Fairgrounds Rd., Mariposa. For more gardening and event information, visit our website (http://cemariposa.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardener/) and Facebook page (UC Master Gardeners of Mariposa County). UC Master Gardeners staff a Helpline serving Mariposa County, including Greeley Hill, Coulterville, and Lake Don Pedro (209-966-7078 or mgmariposa@ucdavis.edu). Listen to us on the radio at KRYZ 98.5 FM on Wednesdays at 5 pm and Saturdays at 2 pm.