



## Fall: Time to Add Native Plants

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*Ron Allen, UC Master Gardener, Mariposa County*

Fall is the time to plant California natives. The weather is cooler, the first soaking rains are imminent, and yet there is still plenty of good sunlight. These factors make for good initial foliage growth and root development.

The motivation for adding native plants comes down to one thing: water. Mariposa County enjoys a somewhat hot, but generally Mediterranean climate; we have cool winters, wet springs, and dry summers. California natives are adapted to our long, dry summers. Filling your garden and landscape with natives saves on irrigation expenses once the plants are established. Also, native plants are adapted to local soil types and are resistant to local plant pathogens, insect pests, and herbivores. By gardening with native plants you will save again on insecticides, soil amendments, deer screens, rodent traps, etc.



**California Poppy (left) and monarch butterfly on Narrowleaf Milkweed (right). Photo credit: Ron Allen.**

It's easy to get started growing California natives. First, make a survey of your site. Take an inventory of plants already present, and try to figure out how to complement them. Choose plants that are adapted and grow well in your local ecological niche. This can depend upon your aesthetic and goals. Do you want attractive ornamental natives? Do you lean toward supporting pollinators? Maybe fire resistance or bank stabilization is key? Please feel free to call our UC Master Gardener Helpline in Mariposa County for suggestions.

If you want a simple approach, you can scatter native annual wildflower seeds, such as California Poppy. If you're keen on helping pollinators--and the monarch butterfly in particular--then set down some milkweeds in the *Asclepias* genus. These perennials are the only plants upon which monarchs lay their eggs. Good examples are the Narrowleaf and Showy Milkweeds. A great choice among shrubs is the Toyon, an attractive evergreen that can become a small tree. In the summer it is covered with creamy white flowers, drawing bees and butterflies. In the fall, it produces bright red berries that attract birds. It is very fire resistant, and it's one shrub that you can plant close to structures.



**Red berries favored by birds cover the Toyon bush (left) in the fall. Douglas Fir and Canyon Live Oak seedlings ready for planting (right). Photo credit: Ron Allen.**

If your landscaping plans are ambitious, and you're at an elevation of 3,000 feet or more, you can try planting Douglas Fir seedlings. An excellent companion for these conifers is the Canyon Live Oak whose roots support an ectomycorrhizal fungus beneficial to young Douglas fir growth.

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*UC Master Gardeners of Mariposa County serve Mariposa County, including Coulterville, Greeley Hill and Don Pedro. For gardening and event information, call us at 209-966-7078 or email [mgmariposa@ucdavis.edu](mailto:mgmariposa@ucdavis.edu). Find us online at [http://cemariposa.ucanr.edu/Master\\_Gardener](http://cemariposa.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardener), on Facebook (UC Master Gardeners of Mariposa County), and on YouTube at "UCCE Mariposa". Listen to us on KRYZ 98.5 FM radio Wednesdays at 2pm and Saturdays at 5pm.*