

Want Native Plants In Your Garden? Start Here To Get Your Footing

Leimone Waite, Master Gardener, July 19, 2019

Q: I have an approximately 250-square-foot area in my yard that I'm landscaping and I would like to use California native plants to help out our native wildlife. Do you have some suggestions on how I can get started?

A: It's great that you want to use native plants. I am assuming that you have heard about the insect apocalypse that is happening worldwide with the loss of pollinators, butterfly's and many other native insects. This is directly related to the loss of native plants that provide habitat for these insects. Most non-native plants cannot provide food to native insects as the plants are toxic to the native insect. And if the insects cannot survive, especially plant eating ones such as caterpillars, there may not be enough food for birds. And if there is a limited amount of birds, other wildlife may suffer from a lack of food supply and so on up the food chain.



The Shasta Chapter of the California Native Plant Society celebrates California native plant species annually at the Shasta College Spring Plant Sale. (Photo: Jay Thesken)

For the best wildlife habitat you want to choose native plants that are indigenous to our local area. Northern California wildlife has evolved along with our local native plants for thousands of generations allowing insects, birds and other wildlife to find shelter in the plant and to feed off of berries, leaves and flowers.



Shasta College Native Plant Sale (Photo: Jay Thesken)

Another thing to keep in mind is that not all California native plants will do well in our climate. California has over 4,600 native plants and many are native to coastal areas or higher elevations and may not grow successfully here in the hot valley.

For ideas about what plants might work best in your yard, the California Native Plant Society has a science-based website at <https://calscape.org/> that can be helpful in

determining the native plants that will do well in our area.

When you get to the Calscape site click on the map icon to the right of the "Native To" box and then you can choose your site on the map. Once you do this, and click done, the website returns a list of native plants that will do well in your area. You can further narrow the search by choosing categories such as

trees, shrubs, grasses, perennials, shade, sun, soil type, bloom time, etc. It has excellent photos and descriptions including drought tolerance, size at maturity and requirements for optimal growth, lists of companion plants, and statewide sources for obtaining the plants.



The Shasta Chapter of the California Native Plant Society celebrates California native plant species annually at the Shasta College Spring Plant Sale. (Photo: Jay Thesken)



The Shasta Chapter of the California Native Plant Society will be selling California native plant species at the Shasta College Spring Plant Sale. (Photo: Jay Thesken)

To get ideas about using these plants in the landscape try the following websites: The Saving Water partnership website at <http://www.savingwaterpartnership.org/concept-plans-and-design-templates/> was created after the fires in Sonoma County for folks rebuilding and offers several design templates that include California Native plants. These plans emphasize fire-safe plantings and are scalable to different size landscapes.

Another website that has landscape ideas using native plants is the UC Davis arboretum planting plans at <https://arboretum.ucdavis.edu/tags/planting-plans>, this site has several planting plans that include native plants.



Native plants have curb appeal. (Photo: Donal Jonio)

To obtain native plants locally there are several sources. The Turtle Bay's Nursery at the McConnell Arboretum, Wyntour Gardens and the Shasta College Nursery all have California Native Plants for sale year round. The local chapter of the California Native Plant Society also has plant sales twice a year in April and October.

The Shasta Master Gardeners Program can be reached by phone at 242-2219 or email mastergardener@shastacollege.edu. The gardener office is staffed by volunteers trained by the University of California to answer gardeners' questions using information based on scientific research.