



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Native Plants

Our Field of Dreams – “If you Plant Them, They Will Grow” (September 21, 2019)

by Patti Phillips and Neil Fernbaugh, UCCE Master Gardeners

About six years ago we decided to convert a large portion of our property to a drought tolerant, low maintenance native plant garden. With all the recent concerns about loss of bees, decline of Monarch butterflies, and dwindling wildlife, we wanted to find out whether changes in our garden could make a difference. Within a few years, we discovered that it could. We now have a greater variety of birdlife, and we have observed a far greater variety of native bees, butterflies, and other beneficial insects than we had ever seen before. And all this has occurred despite the fact that we are citrus growers, surrounded by acres of monoculture.

What we have learned is that even in our small garden, we can contribute to biodiversity, simplify our garden maintenance, and significantly cut our water use, while creating a beautiful home, not just for ourselves, but for the creatures and critters.

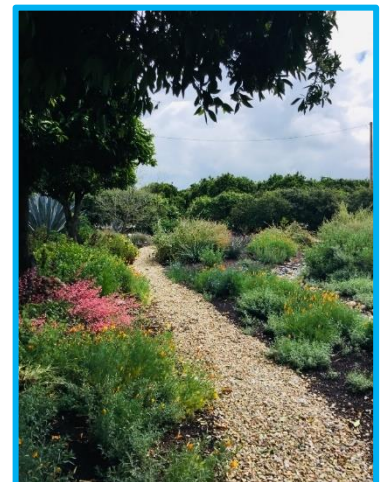
Out of state visitors say there are no seasons in California. It's either hot, or drab and rainy (if we're lucky). In our native plant garden though, we see constant changes through the seasons. We have almost year-round flowers but have learned to see the beauty of our native grasses turning from green to golden and have watched our native buckwheat's change in color from green to pink, to white and finally to a summer bronze. We have come to appreciate that California is truly a Golden state and enjoy colors beyond what a year-round green lawn has to offer.

Fall is the right time to make changes in your garden, and now is the best time to plant natives. After six years of success, we are pretty comfortable in saying that our choices are good for the San Joaquin Valley, but our garden soil is clay, and depending on what soil you have, other varieties may work as well.

We started with some "foundational" plantings that would stay green all year round. Our California Lilac (*Ceanothus 'Remote Blue'*) has lived for the last several years with virtually no summer water. The same is true for our California Toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*) and Sugar Bush (*Rhus ovata*), both of which seem to be loved by a variety of bird life. We also found some success with one particular Manzanita that seems able to survive in our clay soil -- Austin Griffiths Manzanita (*Arctostaphylos manzanita x densiflora*). These larger shrubs can provide privacy, habitat, and visual impact in home gardens.

A variety of native buckwheats and sages have also survived with minimal water and care. California Buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum foliosum*) is a bush that grows to about a yard tall and changes from white to pink, to bronze in fall. You've probably seen it along the sides of the highways all around the state, but not noticed that it is a perennial and annually returns to its winter green color. Other Buckwheat's like Shasta Buckwheat (*Eriogonum umbellatum polyanthum*) are much shorter but have beautiful, long lasting yellow flowers. San Miguel Island Buckwheat (*Eriogonum grande rubescens*), which needs part shade inland,

A Pride of Madeira (not a native, but attractive) on the left is set off by a yellow flowering Encelia and a variety of native penstemon and fuchsias.



In a shadier part of the garden, Monkey Flower, Coral Bells and annual California Poppies border the left side of the path under citrus trees, while California Fuschia, poppies, brakelights aloe and sages grow on the sunny side of the path.

loves clay soil and flowers a bright pink red into mid-summer. Juncos, towhees, quail and other seed loving birds are particularly attracted to this low growing plant.

Sages are another dependable planting in our San Joaquin Valley soils. Cleveland Sage (*Salvia clevelandii* 'Deer Springs') and Grey Musk Sage (*Salvia* 'Poza Blue') are tough, low water bushes with blue flowers and strong but wonderful fragrances. There is also a "Creeping Sage" (*Salvia* 'Bees Bliss') that works well as a grey, spreading groundcover. Hummingbird Sage (*Salvia spathecea*), which needs more shade here in the valley, lives up to its name for attracting hummingbirds and butterflies.

Among our favorite ground covers are yarrows and coyote bushes. Pigeon Point is a Dwarf Coyote bush (*Baccharus pilularis* 'Pigeon Point') that can spread 5-10 feet quickly as a ground cover. A few plants could cover what at one point might have been a lawn. We think that the plantings around the Tulare County Office of Education on South Mooney are a coyote bush variety. Again, these take no summer water, and are loved by native bees, flies, and beneficial insects. Even the most low-laying white yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) can serve as a great groundcover, and mowed back yearly, will easily spread.



Dwarf Coyote Bush and Bees Bliss Sage

There are far more successful natives than we can cover in one article, but this is the time of year to ask about them at your local nursery. If you look online, you can also find regional that specialize in native plants, such as Intermountain Nursery or Las Pilitas Nursery; or local organizations like the Alta Peak chapter of the California Native Plant Society which have fall sales in Three Rivers <https://altapeakcnps.org/news/> and the Sequoia Riverlands Trust (<https://sequoiariverlands.org/>) on Dry Creek above Woodlake.

Are you interested in becoming a Master Gardener? The UC Master Gardener program of Tulare/Kings Counties is recruiting! Our next class runs January 22 through June 10. Applications will be available online in August and must be turned in by October 30. We will be holding a mandatory orientation on Wed., Oct 9 @ 3:00 to share what the training course and the volunteer commitment entail. Please call our office (684-3343) with any questions...we look forward to talking with all interested gardeners! Check us out at: https://ucanr.edu/sites/UC_Master_Gardeners/Become_a_Master_Gardener/

The UCCE Master Gardeners will be available to answer your gardening questions at the following venues in September & October:

Visalia Farmers' Market – Every Saturday morning (8-11 am), Sears parking lot, Mooney Blvd.
Hanford "Thursday Night Marketplace" – 2nd Thursday (5:30 – 9:00 pm) through October.
Sept 26 - Tulare County Employee Health Fair
Oct 3 - Eagle Mountain Casino Health Fair
Oct 12, 10 am - 2 pm: Plant Clinic – Hofman's Nursery, Hanford

For answers to all your home gardening questions, call the Master Gardeners in Tulare County at (559) 684-3325, Tuesdays and Thursdays between 9:30 and 11:30 am; or Kings County at (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30-11:30 a.m.; or visit our website to search past articles, find links to UC gardening information, or to email us with your questions: http://ucanr.edu/sites/UC_Master_Gardeners/

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