



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Drought Tolerant Stars for any Landscape (June 22, 2024)

by Tulare/Kings Counties Master Gardeners

Drought-tolerant native plants can really perk up our hot San Joaquin Valley gardens even in the summer. Here are a few native plants that really stand out as stars in a xeric garden.

Salvia, or sage, is one of the easiest and most rewarding to grow. The Salvia genus is in the mint family and includes more than 900 species throughout the world. Some of them are just made to order for our climate zone.

Autumn Sage (*Salvia greggii*) belies its name by blooming from spring through late fall. This small evergreen bush bears one inch flowers ranging from white through pink and red. In August when other plants are languishing in the heat, the merry colors of red, pink, white, or deep pink and white “hot lips” dull the heat just a bit (even if only in one’s mind!).



Cleveland Sage (*Salvia Clevelandii*) is a favorite for fragrance. All sages are aromatic, but the foliage of this evergreen bush broadcasts its marvelous aroma to the world. In the evening, one can enjoy its delicious fragrance even thirty feet from the bush. Its lavender blossoms, which grow on long stems in widely spaced whorls, just add to its appeal.

White sage (*Salvia apiana*) also flourishes in our gardens. With large, wooly, aromatic silver green leaves, this sage contrasts nicely with the other spikier sage bushes. In spring, it sports white tinged with lavender flower whorls.



California fuchsia (*Epilobium canum*) is another stalwart in our gardens. With spiky gray-green leaves, this shrubby perennial bursts into a profusion of orange to red trumpet-shaped flowers which attract hummingbirds in the fall when other sources of nectar are scarce. One variety grows four feet tall in upright, slightly arched stalks. Other varieties stand from six inches to two feet in height, spreading up to four feet wide. These fuchsia spread by seed or root and can become somewhat invasive. Since they transplant well, you can just divide the plants in the fall and share with friends.

Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) graces many gardens in the Central Valley. Though native to Europe and Asia, one form grows wild on California’s Channel Islands, and all purchased locally thrive in our climate. Tiny flowers in red, white, pink, or yellow grow in flat clusters held above a mound of feathery green leaves. The taller ones make nice cut flowers and can be dried for winter enjoyment. Blooming in summer and early fall, yarrow is virtually carefree except for some deadheading to prolong the flowering season. Even when not in bloom, the evergreen mounding foliage graces the landscape.



Penstemon or Beardtongue is another favorite. Penstemons need a little more water than the others mentioned and do appreciate some afternoon shade. But their beauty easily compensates for these slightly higher requirements. Garden penstemon hybrids which are available locally are bushy upright perennials which grow two to four feet high with narrow green leaves and lipped flowers up to two inches long in colors ranging from pink to wine red.

Penstemons normally bloom from mid-summer through fall. A favorite variety “garnet” blooms profusely for ten months of the year, resting only in March and April when other plants are bursting into flower. Another favorite is “Margarita BOP” with lavender blooms in early spring.

Penstemons have another quality to appreciate --they closely resemble snapdragons. Penstemons perennials in our climate zone and don’t require yearly setting out and removal. Penstemons are somewhat more floppy than snapdragons and need some support near a sidewalk.

Other drought tolerant plants which do well in our gardens are Texas Ranger (*Leucophyllum frutescens*), a compact shrub with silvery foliage and pink flowers in the summer; and trailing rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis* “prostratus”), which makes lovely

green mounds spreading four to eight feet wide. This groundcover even squeezes out the weeds! Deer grass (*Muhlenbergia rigens*) and Pink Muhly (*M. capillaris*) are lovely mounding grasses which do well in the Central Valley.

Take the hot summer months off from garden work to plan ahead to add some of these favorites for next year's enjoyment. October is the best month of the year to set out drought tolerant perennials, as new plantings will require constant monitoring during July and August heat. The cool fall and winter months will also give the roots time to establish before the hot weather sets in. Browse the local nurseries and pick out some non-thirsty plants for your landscape!

The Tulare-Kings Counties Master Gardeners will answer your questions in person:

Visalia Farmer's Market, 1st & 3rd Saturdays, 8 - 11 am, Tulare Co. Courthouse North parking lot

Questions? Call the Master Gardeners:

Tulare County: (559) 684-3325, Tues & Thurs, 9:30-11:30;

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