



I Planted California Natives: What Do I Do in May?

Water

To prolong the growing season, continue to water most plants regularly except for spent bulbs, corms or rhizomatous plants such as Blue Dicks (*Dipterostemon capitatus*), Humboldt Lily (*Lilium humboldtii*), and Douglas Iris (*Iris douglasiana*). Unless we have rain, water other plants deeply on cool days and allow the soil to dry out before watering again, about every two weeks. Do you have questions about the water needs of individual plants? Search for your plant by name at [Calscape.org](https://www.calscape.org) and scroll down to plant description and landscaping information for watering advice.

Prune

Get ready for summer by selectively pinching and pruning your perennials and shrubs to promote new blooms and achieve more balanced growth. Deadhead or remove the spent flowers of Penstemons (*Penstemon* species) and Monkeyflowers (*Diplacus*, *Erythranthe*, or *Mimulus* species). Cut back long stems of tall growing varieties of California Fuchsia (*Epilobium* species) to encourage stronger growth to support the heavy bloom of late summer.

Once your Ceanothus and Manzanita flowers have faded, pinch back to a quarter inch behind the spent blossoms to stimulate vigorous growth. If you miss this step, the new growth may originate beyond the old blossoms leaving leggy, bare branches. Cut old stems of Oregon Grape (*Berberis* species) a few inches from the ground to encourage fuller growth in the younger sections of the plant. Lightly prune Hollyleaf Cherry (*Prunus ilicifolia*) and California Wax Myrtle (*Morella californica*) after flowering and before the summer heat sets in.

Plant

You can plant coastal plants and shrubs that will be watered through the summer. Try Red-flowered Buckwheat (*Eriogonum grande* var. *rubescens*), Saint Catherine's Lace (*Eriogonum giganteum*), or Seaside Daisy (*Erigeron glaucus*).

If you live a mile or more from the coast, you can plant milkweed, the host plant for the larva of the Western Monarch Butterfly. The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation [recommends growing native, winter-dormant milkweeds](#) to prevent disruptions in the butterfly's winter dormancy period and avoid spreading disease. Plant California Milkweed (*Asclepias californica*), Narrow Leaf Milkweed (*Asclepias fascicularis*), or Woollypod Milkweed (*Asclepias eriocarpa*), all native to this area. The Santa Monica Mountains Fund [Milkweed Planting and Care Tips](#) answers your questions on how to grow this vital habitat plant successfully.

If you live within a mile of the beach, plant nectar plants such as Black Sage (*Salvia mellifera*), Pacific Aster (*Symphotrichum chilense*) or Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) instead of milkweed. The Xerces Society [Monarch Nectar Plant Guides](#) give details for monarch-specific nectar plants by state or region. Here you can also learn how to contribute data about the monarch butterfly's preferred nectar plants by submitting information and photos of your individual observations.



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Sow

If your garden has a damp area or you live near the coast you can still spread some annual wildflower seeds to get another burst of color in the summer. By watering consistently, you can get summer blooms from California Poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*), Chinese Houses (*Collinsia heterophylla*), Desertbells (*Phacelia campanularia*), and Sunflowers (*Helianthus annuus*). If possible, allow your annual wildflowers to dry and go to seed to provide forage for seed-eating birds such as California Quail, California Towhee and Mourning Dove. It's important to not spray your wildflowers, or any nearby plants, with pesticides, to provide healthy, clean seed. The seeds left uneaten may lie dormant in the soil for winter rains to bring forth next year's display.

Mulch

Spread mulch over most of your garden to suppress weed growth, keeping it away from the root crowns to avoid fungal growth. Leave a few bare patches of soil in a dry area or under shrubs for native bees to dig their nests. If you have patches of invasive annual grasses that are too thick to weed, mow them down as soon as possible before they have the chance to set seed. Consider sowing or planting a perennial groundcover to compete with the invasive grasses next year.

Clean up

Watch for warm season weeds such as Crabgrasses (*Digitaria* species) and Spotted Spurge (*Euphorbia maculata*). Pull them up while the soil is still soft. Make sure you dig up Field Bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*) and Bermudagrass (*Cynodon dactylon*) completely, so their horizontal stems (stolons and/or rhizomes) don't take hold and spread. If you're unsure whether a seedling is a weed or a wildflower, see if you can identify the plant using the [UC IPM Weed Photo Gallery](#), or the phone app Seek by iNaturalist.

Online Resources mentioned in this article

Calscape.org

<https://calscape.org/>

Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation

<https://xerces.org>

Milkweed Planting and Care Tips

<https://www.samofund.org/milkweed#Milkweed-Planting-and-Care-Tips>

UC IPM: Weed Photo Gallery

https://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/weeds_intro.html

References

O'Brien, Bart, Betsey Landis, and Ellen Mackey. Care & Maintenance of Southern California Native Plant Gardens. Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, Los Angeles California. Claremont, CA: Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden, 2006. (out of print)

Popper, Helen. California Native Plant Gardening: A Month-by-Month Guide. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2012. Available for loan from the [Ojai Library](#) (hard copy) and the [Blanchard Community Library](#), Santa Paula (hard copy and eBook).