Garden Design with Native Plants

*A Practical Guide*

by Ann Elliott

Mount Lassen Chapter - California Native Plant Society

Why Design with Natives?

Example Native Plant Garden Designs

Garden Design Basics

Planting Your Design

California Floristic Province

Mediterranean Climate Zone

- Cool, wet winters
- Long, hot, dry summers

Native Plants are Adapted to Our Climate

They need **less:**

- water
- fertilizer
- soil amendments

- pesticides
- maintenance

So:
Native plants provide natural food and habitat for more:
- pollinators
- other insects
- birds
- wildlife

Considerations in Designing Any Garden
Goals for Your Space
- style
- flow
- maintenance level

Document Your Conditions
- existing features
  - buildings
  - hardscape
  - vegetation
- soil
  - loam, clay, granitic, volcanic
  - permeability
  - nutrients
- exposure
  - sun
  - shade
  - wind
  - view

as development ↑
Our yards with native plants can provide a “bridge” to nearby remaining wildlands.

natural habitats ↓
Pick Plants to Suit Your Space

- Use local plants if possible:
  - adapted to climate
  - most useful for wildlife

Group Plant by Needs:

- sun
- soil
- water

Keep Lakes, Creeks, and Rivers Clean

Design Aesthetics

- color (flowers and leaves)
- texture (vary and mimic)
- rhythm (swathes and repetition of plants)
- symmetry
- plant lightly (Be patient while they grow.)
Example Native Plant Garden Designs

Don’t reinvent the wheel!

- CNPS.org
  - Yerba Buena Nursery
  - Santa Clara Valley Chapter – CNPS
  - Acterra Stewardship Native Plant Nursery
- native-again-landscape.com

Plant Naming

Scientific name: *Genus species* ‘Cultivar’

Common name

Eriogonum fasciculatum - California buckwheat

Arctostaphylos bakeri ‘Louis Edmunds’

Simple Sunny Front Yard

Ground Covers and Grasses

CA – *Ceanothus* (any low cultivar)

MR – *Muhlenbergia rigens* (deer grass)

*Ceanothus* species (California wild lilac)

- Dazzling floral displays in spring
- No/little water
- Full sun (mostly)
- Many species and cultivars
- Sizes: groundcovers to small trees

*Ceanothus maritimus* ‘Valley Violet’ (3 ft.)
Grasses

- Add textural interest to garden
- Provide habitat for birds
- Generally pest-free
- Little water

*Muhlenbergia rigens* - deer grass (3-5 ft.)

Very Drought Tolerant
Sunny Location, Clay Soil

Am: *Achillea millefolium*
AmAG: *Arctostaphylos* (manzanita) larger
CTB: *Ceanothus* (choose larger)
Eff: *Eriogonum fasciculatum*
California buckwheat
Mv: *Monardella villosa*
coyote mint
Np: *Nassella pulchra*
purple needlegrass
**Arctostaphylos species - manzanita**

- urn-shaped flowers
- attractive bark
- no/little irrigation
- evergreen; woody
- many types
- groundcovers to small trees

**Arctostaphylos manzanita ‘Dr. Hurd’**

**Arctostaphylos bakeri ‘Louis Edmunds’**

**Arctostaphylos densiflora ‘Howard McMinn’ Vine Hill manzanita**
Ceanothus ‘Ray Hartman’

Ceanothus ‘Concha’

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California buckwheat
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purple needlegrass
**Eriogonum species - buckwheat**
- Small flowers in clusters, fading to rust in late summer
- Evergreen
- Full sun
- Little/no water
- Food for pollinators and beneficial insects; habitat for birds

**Eriogonum fasciculatum** - California buckwheat

**Eriogonum giganteum – Saint Catherine’s lace**

**Eriogonum umbellatum – sulfur-flowered buckwheat**

**Very Drought Tolerant**
**Sunny Location, Clay Soil**

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Monardella villosa - coyote mint

Achillea millefolium - yarrow

Stipa pulchra (Nasella pulchra) – purple needle grass
**Bouteloua gracilis - blue grama grass**

**Perennial Meadow**

A: Achillea millefolium  
E: Epilobium canum (California fuchsia)  
(grass): ie. Festuca 'Siskiyou Blue'

I: Iris douglasiana  
P: Penstemon heterophyllus 'Margarita BOP'

SC: Solidago sp. (golden rod)

**Epilobium canum (Zauschneria sp.) - California fuchsia**
Festuca idahoensis ‘Siskiyou Blue’

Iris douglasiana (purple and yellow varieties)

Penstemon heterophyllus
foothill penstemon ‘Margarita BOP’

Solidago velutina – golden rod
Habitat Meadow Garden

AH: *Arctostaphylos densiflora* 'Howard McMinn'
CA: *Ceanothus* (low growing)
CD: *Ceanothus* 'Dark Star' or 'Ray Hartman' (bush)
CO: *Cercis occidentalis* (Western Redbud)
FK: *Fremontodendron* 'Ken Taylor'
MA: *Mimulus aurantiacus*
MR: *Muhlenbergia rigens* (grass); *Festuca* 'Siskiyou Blue'
SA: *Salvia apiana*
SB: *Salvia Sonomensis* 'Bee's Bliss'
SC: *Salvia clevelandii*

Cercis occidentalis - western redbud

Fremontodendron californicum - flannel bush

- 6-15 feet
- Requires excellent drainage
- No summer water once established

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**Mimulus aurantiacus** – bush monkey flower

**Salvia species** – sages

*Salvia apiana* - white sage

**Salvia mellifera** - black sage

**Salvia clevelandii** - Cleveland sage
Sidewalk Mow Strip Designs
by Santa Clara Valley Chapter - CNPS

- Low Water & Low Maintenance
- Hummingbird and Butterfly Magnet
- Shade Garden Under Street Trees
**Baccharis pilularis ‘Twin Peaks II’** – Dwarf Coyote Brush

**Penstemon eatonii** – firecracker penstemon

**Eriogonum grande var. rubescens** – red (rosy)-flowered buckwheat

**Hummingbird and Butterfly Magnet**
Shade Garden Parking Strip

Salvia spathacea - hummingbird sage

Flat Garden –
Acterra Stewardship
Native Plant Nursery
(now Grassroots Ecology)

Hillside Garden
Acterra Stewardship
Native Plant Nursery
(now Grassroots Ecology)
Lawn Conversion to Natives
• rebates?
• kill lawn
  – Bermuda grass? – solarize one summer
  – sheet mulch
• decide on basic design
• convert irrigation to drip
• plant

Irrigation Conversion
• sprinkler removal
• pressure regulator
• drip line
• emitters (allow for later removal)

Irrigation tips
• Plant in hydrozones.
• Irrigate for about 2 years after planting
• Some plants thrive with supplemental irrigation.
• Irrigate during dry winters.
• Irrigate long and slowly.

Reading by Design
specialized gardening books
Websites to Explore

- California Native Plant Society  [CNPS.org](https://www.cnps.org)  Calscape
- Arboretum All-Stars  [arboretum.ucdavis.edu](https://arboretum.ucdavis.edu)
- Butte County Master Gardeners  [http://ucanr.edu/sites/bcmg/](http://ucanr.edu/sites/bcmg/)  Real Dirt Blog
- Water Use Classification of Landscape Species  [http://ucanr.edu/sites/WUCOLS/](http://ucanr.edu/sites/WUCOLS/)
- Las Pilitas Nursery  [laspilitas.com](http://laspilitas.com)
- Yerba Buena Nursery  [www.yerbabuenanursery.com](http://www.yerbabuenanursery.com)
Native Plant Gardens to Visit

Local:
- Butte County Master Gardener demonstration gardens at Patrick Ranch (on the Midway)
- Gateway Science Museum
- Floral Native Nursery
- Chico Creek Nature Center
- Lake Oroville Visitor Center

Regional:
- Sacramento River Discovery Center, Red Bluff
- Turtle Bay McConnell Arboretum & Botanical Garden, Redding
- UC Davis Arboretum
Where to Buy Native Plants

Local:
• Floral Native Nursery, Chico
• Native Springs Nursery, Durham
• Nurseries with some Natives
  – Little Red Hen
  – Magnolia Gift & Garden,
  – The Plant Barn
  – Prestige Nursery
• Mt. Lassen Chapter CNPS chapter plant sales, Chico

Regional:
• Sacramento River Discovery Center, Red Bluff
• Turtle Bay McConnell Arboretum nursery, Redding
• UC Davis Arboretum plant sales (spring & fall)
• Peaceful Valley Nursery, Grass Valley
• Annie’s Annuals, Richmond, retail & mail order
• CNPS Shasta chapter plant sales, Redding (spring)

Planting Tips
• plant in fall
• good drainage
• few soil amendments
• don’t disturb roots
• crown slightly above ground level
• mulch 2-4 inches

Match the plant to the site.
More recommended plants

**Aristolochia californica – California Pipevine**
Host to Pipevine Swallowtail Butterfly larvae

*Photo by Eve Werner*

**Arctostaphylos uva-ursi – Bearberry (kinnikinnick), low-growing manzanita**
- Low spreading
- Many cultivars
- Spring flowers
- Needs afternoon shade inland
- Needs supplemental irrigation

*Photo by Telos Rare Bulbs*

**Dichelostemma capitatum**
Firecracker flower

*Photo by Telos Rare Bulbs*

**Dichelostemma ida-maia**
Blue Dicks

*Photo by Telos Rare Bulbs*
Blue eyed grass
*Sisyrinchium bellum*

- 4-12 inches
- Sun to partial shade
- Blooms in spring
- Reseeds readily
- Tolerates some clay
- Occasional-moderate water

**Asclepias speciosa** - Showy milkweed

- 2-4 ft. stems
- Very sweet fragrance
- Large, soft gray-green leaves
- Tolerates heavy soil
- Full sun
- No-occasional water

**Asclepias fascicularis** - Narrow-leaved milkweed

- Flowers smaller than showy milkweed
- Full sun
- No-occasional water
- Can spread aggressively

**Chlorogalum pomeridianum** var. *pomeridianum*

- Narrow-leaved soap-plant
Oregon grape
*Berberis aquifolium*
- 3-6 feet & Low growing varieties
- Sun to shade

*Carpenteria californica* - California bush anemone
- spring blossoms
- large, evergreen
- afternoon shade
- Little to regular water

*Cercocarpus betuloides* - Mountain mahogany
- 5-20 ft, evergreen
- spring blossoms; feathery summer fruit
- no/little water

*Aesculus californica* - California buckeye
- 15-40 ft.
- little-moderate water
- full sun
- attractive fruit
- mid-late summer leaf drop
**Umbellaria californica** - California bay

- 25-50 ft. Sun or shade
- evergreen, aromatic leaves
- good hedge

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Pick a design, and make it your own.