The spring woodland garden has many bright stars in the form of shrubs: ceanothus and mahonia come immediately to mind. But look a little closer and you will see how lovely the ribes are as well this time of year. The native ribes are far more soft-spoken but have equally nice things to say as their brighter companions.

Ribes are perhaps best enjoyed in more private, contemplative spots in the garden than bigger, bolder shrubs. Near a bench? Close beside a pathway for easy viewing and touching? Their delicate fragrant flowers and foliage want such close encounters (but do take care for the possibility of thorns!) Appealing to people and wildlife, ribes - placed well - play an important role in the garden year-round.

Ribes is the only genus in the gooseberry (Grossulariaceae) family and according to the Jepson Manual it includes 120 species, with many more cultivars. Commonly known as currants or gooseberries, ribes are informally designated as currants if they do not bear thorns or gooseberries if they do. Ribes are prized for their ornamental value, the wildlife they attract and their flavorful edible berries.

Many many ribes are native to California. I have several pink flowering varieties throughout my garden as well as the yellow flowering R. aureum and the tiny red flowering R. viburnifolium (aka Catalina Island currant, Catalina Perfume, etc.), the spicy fragrant foliage of which is a good ground cover in partial shade under un-irrigated blue oaks.
through the *Seasons*

There are many more I could and would like to grow, including fuchsia flowered ribes (*R. speciosum*), with its showy red pendant blooms all in a row beneath its branches in early spring; the white flowered form (*R. indecorum*) which is said to bear very good berries; the Canyon Gooseberry (*R. menziesii*), with its petite little red and white blooms, and more ...

A nice handful of native ribes will thrive in the North State home garden, but if I had to choose one to start with, I would choose one of the pink flowered forms – specifically *R. sanguineum*, which is found easily in the trade. *R. malvaceum* or *R. nevadense* are both very nice as well and possible to find at specialty native plant nurseries or native plant sales.

All three of these pink flowered forms are thornless and bear graceful pendulous pink flower clusters flushing from reddish-deep-pink to pale-pink to white for quite some time from late winter to early spring. The leaves are soft, a little sticky and when brushed or bruised emit a resinous, pleasant woodland scent. The plants prefer a bit of shade especially from late afternoon sun, and will tolerate full summer drought conditions or irrigated garden conditions. They will go dormant and lose their leaves if they receive no summer water, but they perk right back up in fall with first rain. In time, these plants will grow to erect, shapely open shrubs. They can make very nice single focal points, or play well tucked into other shrubs along a busy border. While they are deer resistant, the deer in my neighborhood do lightly browse the newest growth in late winter sometimes.