**NATIVE PLANTS for the Garden**

**FRITILLARIES:** Native Bulbs that Add Seasonal Color,

by Jennifer Jewell

Some of the best gardens in my mind are those with a depth of planting that reveals itself over time. Revelations that can only be appreciated fully as you witness the slow unfolding of each season in their turn. Part of what I consider to be the most satisfying of a garden’s seasonal revelations includes that magical appearance of different bulbs in surprising places in each season. Bulbs add a layer of depth - both temporal and spatial - that can transform and elevate a standard landscape into a good garden. A layered, considered, and loved garden.

Whether you are a native plant purist, or a gardener looking to incorporate more and more natives for reasons of aesthetics, principles, or economy - you have a nice handful of California native bulbs to choose from when adding this layer to your garden.

Some of my favorite bulbs - the Fritillarias - are beginning to bloom in the lower elevations of the North State right now. Late February through June will see their full unfolding in the wild.

Fritillaries are member of the Lily (Liliaceae) Family and are perennial herbs growing from membranous bulbs. They are native to temperate portions of Europe, Asia and North America and the Jepson Manual currently lists 24 species and varieties in California. Almost all of the ones with which I am familiar have smallish downward facing “nodding” bell or cupped shaped flowers that range from the bright and cheerful pinks/reds to much more muted colors of brown, burgundy and yellow.

_Fritilla ri affinis_ (right middle), which ranges from very dark brown with checkered markings to a clearer reddish brown with markings, can be seen February through March along fern bank in Upper Bidwell Park. _F. recurva_, is noted for the curled back edges of its petals when mature, and also varies in color but ranges from orange to red to brown, and can be seen in spring on the Magalia serpentine.
through the **Seasons**

**Interest and Depth to a Garden**

*F. eastwoodiae* seems less common but can be seen throughout the eastern edges of our region, and ranges from greenish to yellow to red and also has recurved petal tips. One of the brightest of our native Fritillaries is the so-called adobe lily (*Fritillaria pluriflora*) which is a rare and endangered species (listed 1B.2). This bulb grows in clay soils that are generally damp in spring but dry and hard in summer and sports multiple blooms of bright pink to red. (page 3.)

As with all natives, not all native bulbs or native Fritillaries are easy or even willing to settle into home gardens successfully, but enough of them are that you have some good possibilities. Before getting into specifics on the Fritillaries, let me say very clearly that in my opinion it is NEVER ok to collect bulbs in the wild for transplanting to your own garden. Never. It is far better to mark the spot and collect limited quantities of seed when they have ripened and attempt to propagate from there.

Your best bet by far is to locate a reputable source for some of our native bulbs and start with those. While commercial sources are not easy to find, a few places to try include: http://www.keepingit-greennursery.com, http://www.telosrarabulbs.com, and http://www.yerbabuenanursery.com.

If you do want to try to grow some from seed, according the Pacific Northwest Bulb Society, “Fritillarias are among the easiest and most reliable genera from seed…. And, California Fritillaria need about four months of cold/cool weather to germinate well.” In general both seedlings and mature flowering bulbs want conditions that allow for dappled shade, winter wet and complete summer dry. Most also want good drainage in their winter wet.

Written and photos by Jennifer Jewell. www.jewellgarden.com

Top left - native *Fritillaria* sp. in the foothills of Oroville. Bottom left - mature seed and pod of checker lily (*F. affinis*). Top right - scarlet fritillary by John Whittlesey. Middle right - checker lily (*F. affinis*). Bottom right - pale green-yellow *Fritillaria* sp.