

Go Native

By Giana Crispell, UCCE Certified Master Gardener

Thinking about spicing up your garden next Spring? Are you tired of the same old offerings that every nursery carries? While lovely Spring annuals and perennials offer irresistible color and variety, what if you literally could have it all: a beautiful, low maintenance garden that attracts wildlife, uses very little water, has few or no pest problems, is suitable to California's soil and climate, only requires a bit of deadheading, and once established is almost "hands off?" No we're not talking about plastic in Paradise, but California native plants where the palette is amazing and any landscape design is possible from Japanese to Modern to Mediterranean.

California's native plants offer a unique opportunity to diversify your landscape while using plants that require no fertilizer and are easy to plant as they generally require no soil amendments. In summer, your watering requirements actually go down as natives enter a sort of semi-dormancy for which overwatering can be a death knell. A native landscape is far from brown, scruffy and monotonous. When correctly designed, a native garden can include flowering trees and shrubs, ground covers, and an amazing array of familiar perennials such as poppies, monkey flowers (*Mimulus puniceus*), *Penstemon spectabilis*, *Dudleya brittonii*, *Lupinus succulentus* (Lupine), *Epilobium canum* (California fuchsia), *Iris douglasiana*, *Heuchera* (different varieties of Coral bells), and *Galvezia speciose* (Showy Island Snapdragon).

If going "all in" is too overwhelming then perhaps the next time you are replacing some annuals or perennials you'll give consideration to incorporating natives into your existing landscape. These plants will return year after year with little or no pruning and just some deadheading. The exception to this is if you have clay, compacted or overworked soil in which case you'll need to add about 25% organic compost to the soil before planting. Then water like crazy to remove the air pockets around the root ball. The first watering is the most important a native ever receives. After applying pre-emergent, lay down a 3-4 inch layer of redwood bark as mulch, pulled back 4-6" from the base of each plant.

75 % of your garden should be plantings in evergreens. This avoids the dead/dormant appearance. Suggested trees for this region are: Catalina Ironwood, Box Elder, Redbuds, Island Oaks, Coast Live Oaks, Desert Willows, and White Alder. Popular native groundcovers are *Ceanothus* 'Centennial' and Yankee Point.'

Of course a garden is incomplete without shrubs and screening plants. Natives reveal a rich abundance and diversity here in Manzanita, Wild Lilacs, Toyon, Elderberry, Island Mountain Mahogany, Coastal Sage, Flannel Bush, Coffeeberry, and the Island Bush Poppy. Note that not all California natives work in all areas so it is best to find which work best in your microclimate. You can input your address at <http://www.cnps.org/> to find natives conducive to your area.

Irrigation of natives is not complicated. They prefer moisture that is similar to rainfall. So a micro spray, not drip system is best. If you have a drip in place it can easily be retrofitted. If your plantings are next to a lawn, very likely you need do nothing. One caveat: more natives are killed especially in the summer by over watering. This is their semi-dormant time and they may only need water every 7-10 days (even in heat).

So if you are ready to take the plunge or just put your toe in the water, check with your local nurseries. Here are a few images of these colorful natives:



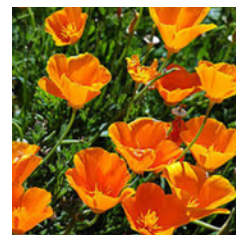
Penstemon 'Spec.'



Encelia



Red Buckwheat



California Poppy