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Why Native Plants?

California's True Landscape

Native vegetation evolved to live with the local climate, soil types, and animals. This long process brings us several gardening advantages.

Save Water

Take advantage of water-conserving plants in your landscape. Once established, many native plants need minimal irrigation beyond normal rainfall. Saving water conserves a vital, limited resource and saves money, too.

Lower Maintenance

Low maintenance landscaping methods are a natural fit with native plants that are already adapted to the local environment. Look forward to less pruning, eliminating chemical fertilizer, and saving time.

Pesticide Freedom

Native plants have developed their own defenses against many pests and diseases. Since most pesticides kill indiscriminately, beneficial insects become collateral victims in the fight against pests. Eliminating pesticides lets natural pest control take over and keeps garden toxins out of our watersheds and ocean.

Invite Wildlife

Native plants, birds, butterflies, beneficial insects, and interesting critters are "made for each other." Research shows that native wildlife clearly prefers native plants. California's wealth of insect pollinators can improve fruit set in your garden, while a variety of native insects and birds will keep your landscape free of mosquitos and plant-eating bugs.

Support Local Ecology

While creating native landscapes can never replace natural habitats lost to development, planting gardens, parks, and roadsides with California natives can provide a "bridge" to nearby remaining wildlands.

Adapted from CNPS Horticulture Brochure

Why Native Plants?

by Tony Baker, Horticulture Co-Chair, South Coast Chapter

From the time of the first Spanish settlers to the present, the natural habitat of Southern California has been hammered by overgrazing, conversion to agriculture, and unbridled development. Much of the land that still supports native vegetation has been compromised by disturbance and the introduction of plants from other locales.

Over 1,000 nonnative plant species have naturalized in California, meaning they are able to reproduce and spread on their own. Many of these plants are able to become dominant because of aggressive tendencies and they often have no natural enemies to keep them in check.

The most pressing threat to our native plant communities, however, is their conversion to housing tracts, mini-malls, parking lots and golf courses.

Our Mediterranean climate is rare on the planet Earth. It only occurs in five places: the coast of Southern California, the southern tip of Africa, the central coast of Chile, the southwestern coast of Australia and the coastal strip surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. Small in area, this climate supports one of the most important biomes on Earth.

In Southern California the most common plant communities are known as Coastal Scrub and Chaparral. In an example of co-evolution, the other areas mentioned have vegetation with the same adaptations and appear the same even though the plants are different.

Unfortunately, our native vegetation has not received the respect it deserves. Too often gardeners turn their back on the many beautiful and hardy California plant species even though they are usually very drought tolerant and often pest free.



Dune Buckwheat (hosting male El Segundo Blue)
Eriogonum parvifolium



Sawtooth Goldenbush
Hazardia squarosa var. *obtusata*



Toyon, California Holly, Christmas Berry
Heteromeles arbutifolia



Deerweed (hosting male Palos Verdes Blue)
Lotus scoparius



Purple Nightshade (with Sonoran Bumblebee)
Solanum xanti

Photographer: Ann Dalkey

The benefits of low water usage and little maintenance should be great incentives to plant natives, but the philosophy of controlling and/or excluding nature in gardens has been pervasive for centuries.

Most of the plants in the nursery trade have little value as habitat for wildlife. The standard lawn grasses are good examples. Not only does the gardener have to water the lawn constantly, but also needs to apply herbicides and pesticides, thus making the green plot sterile of most life except that of the grass.

I would like to suggest that instead of excluding nature from your garden, plant native plants and invite birds, bees and butterflies to visit. Many native plants, both annuals and perennials, have long tubular flowers to attract hummingbirds. It's a symbiotic relationship that benefits the hummingbird by providing nectar and the plant by providing pollination.

Some natives produce edible seeds or berries and are irresistible to birds, while the flowers of others attract butterflies. In fact, a number of butterflies, such as the Palos Verdes Blue Butterfly, are solely dependent on particular plants to carry out their life cycle. If some of these plants are used in the landscape, the butterflies, as well as birds and bees, will find them and you will be helping in their survival and can enjoy their presence in your yard.

I believe the time has come to appreciate and nurture the wonder that surrounds us. Let's bring some of the natural habitat back into our yards. It will benefit the environment and at the same time will allow us to feel a part of our natural heritage.

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