Native Plant Gardening
At the Moment

by Monica Tudor

At the Moment, My California Garden Is Slowly Morphing into its cold-weather phase. The California fuchsia is still holding on to its vibrant orange blooms but the California aster is setting seed. The Lipstick salvia and May night salvias are still going strong and providing shelter and blooms. The Cleveland sages have a handful of blue blooms here and there. The Valley oak’s leaves are still green, but the Crimson Spire™ oaks have turned a reddish brown. So although the seasons are changing, the garden still has color and butterflies — although not as many — and of course the overwintering hummingbirds chasing each other through the Desert-willow and palo verde provide lots of aerial action.

Now is the time I think about planting seeds, dividing plants and starting cuttings. It’s a great way to multiply what you’ve got, and, with a little planning, to share with other gardeners. In the past, I’ve cut twigs from various plants to see if they’d root. Buttonwillow and California grape will set roots easily, and so will cistus. Sometimes the cuttings go directly into the garden where I want the new plants, and sometimes the cuttings go into pots. What kind of soil for the pots? I’ve only used dirt from my garden, since that’s what the plants have to grow in the rest of their lives. If you don’t want to wait for roots, dividing plants is an easy way to get instant new plants. Deer grass...
is easy to split and replant. I’ve dug out the plant and used my shovel to split it into 4 sections, then planted the sections elsewhere in my garden. California asters are another easy plant to multiply; just dig up a shovelful of plant with roots and put it where you want it. Just remember that the new plants will grow much better if they have regular water the first year. I’ll gather seeds from desert marigold (Baileya multi-radialta) and scatter them where I want new plants. They’re also easy to transplant in early spring; just move them before they get more than 2 or 3 inches tall. If you’re going to plant California poppies or other wildflowers, I’d recommend mixing the seed with fine sand, otherwise you’ll seed the plants too close together and they won’t grow as well (I’m speaking from experience). The Desert-willows will also seed themselves. Usually I treat those as weeds and just pull them up.

What else needs to be done?

Weeding, of course. The path through my garden is packed dirt, but it is now sprouting with grass and weeds, courtesy of the nice rain we got before Thanksgiving. Weeds are easy to control with a hula hoe, as long as it’s done when they are small. This time of year the garden overflows the railroad-tie edging and the plants start to cover the path. It looks like a California cottage garden — kind of cool. In some places the path has narrowed to only a foot wide because of the exuberant plants. I’ll eventually cut the plants back, usually later in the season. Within the garden beds, I wait to clean the tops of the Midnight salvias until they turn black from frost. They’ll sprout back in the spring and provide blooms for butterflies and the big black bees. The Lipstick salvias will take over if allowed, so they get whacked by about a third.

I don’t get to the garden much during the week once daylight savings time ends. Come the weekend, though, that’s where I’ll be. I love to hear hummers “chipping,” see what’s growing, and smell the scent of leaves and dirt. I thank God, who provides this sensory perfume and brings me peace, joy, and comfort. ✨

At the Moment (Continued)

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An overgrown path.