Believe it or not, but we are heading towards fall. There’s a tantalizing coolness to the early-morning hours, reminding me that the seasons are finally preparing to change. Thank heavens!

It has been a rough year all over. I ride my horse on the Panorama Vista Preserve and see the effects of the drought everywhere. The river has gone dry and the grass is a golden brown, normal for summer in Bakersfield. What I noticed last weekend were totally leafless cottonwoods. These were not youngsters, but established trees at least as tall as a telephone pole. Apparently their roots no longer reach the water table.

However, all is not doom and gloom. The areas of the preserve with drip irrigation are doing very well and remind us what a life-giving resource water is. Recently, a drip system was installed to support the re-vegetation of the river in an area between the canal and the river. A few medium-sized sycamores are growing at that spot. Apparently they dropped lots of seeds in the area, because now that there is a drip system, all kinds of volunteer sycamores are springing up. It’s pretty cool to see the juvenile trees sprouting because of the “extra” moisture from the drip – especially since it is intended for another plant. Just shows what a little bit of water can grow.

My California garden has its bright spots and casualties. There are three valley oaks in the garden. The oldest is about 6 inches in diameter and has been in the garden for a few years. It is doing an amazing job with very little water. I realized about the middle of July that it had not been included when the rest of the garden was watered. Nevertheless, it is thriving! The two other valley oak trees were planted last winter. They came from 15-gallon nursery pots and are doing okay. The roots are shaded by plants and bark, helping to cool the soil underneath.

Some of my salvias have died back but others have rooted where they touched the ground. The desert agave has gone underground and sent up new plants as well. I found a new deer grass plant, too. I found a Catalina zaushneria near the parent plant, but it had gotten too dry. Hopefully it is summer-dormant and not really dead!

You might remember that the garden was originally a horse corral. (The horse is now at another barn near the Panorama Preserve.) We had a welder cut the oilfield-pipe fencing and re-weld it to form the gates and supports for the walls. This summer my husband and I finished the job of converting the pole barn to a garden shed. It is so nice to have all the tools and equipment in one place and not in the garage.

I like fall because it is prime planting time! This year I’ll be sowing more seeds than in the past. I found some datura seeds and will try to grow two or three plants. My favorite, desert marigold, is always easy to grow from seed. Last year I had elegant clarkia everywhere from a seed mix sold by Theodore Payne Nursery. It might re-seed itself. And of course, the fall plant sale is the place to get all kinds of California native plants. See you there!

Salvia apiana, white sage

Island California fuchsia — Epilobium (Zauschneria) californicum ‘Catalina’