**Adding to the Family:**

**New Plants and New Places**

*by Monica Tudor*

THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO CAME TO the Native Plant Sale on October 24!

The native plant sale was so successful that all the plants were sold out by 10:00 a.m., and I didn’t even get to buy any plants for my own garden. I had my eye on several beautiful native plants, including a chuparosa, some penstemons and some California fuchsias, all very hummingbird-friendly. The chuparosa was planted in the cactus garden at Cal State and the others went home to other gardens.

I had no option but to make a trip to Las Pilitas Nursery in Santa Margarita to get some plants for my own garden. Las Pilitas is one of the native plant nurseries used by the Kern County chapter of CNPS as a source for its annual plant sales. Las Pilitas Nursery has an extensive website, [www.laspilitas.com](http://www.laspilitas.com), packed with hundreds of plant profiles and all kinds of useful information for folks interested in native plants. Anyway, it wasn’t too hard to convince my husband that we should make the drive, so off we went.

At Las Pilitas, we already knew most of the plants we wanted and the staff at the nursery confirmed that our selections were definitely suited to Bakersfield’s climate: bladderpod, creosote bush, blue witch and desert mallow. We did pick up some penstemons and California fuchsias to plant in areas with high shade. All the plants were one-gallon size — easier to pack in the car!

Once home, I began setting out the plants. (The placement part of the planning should have happened first, but I had a pretty good idea of what should go where.) Plants with similar water needs were grouped together before they were even placed in the garden. Then, within each group, the taller ones went in the back of their section of the garden and the shorter ones in the front, per usual garden-design conventions. I also “repaired” a design error from the earlier years, where the plants were not properly grouped by water needs and a high-water-need buttonwillow tree was put behind a low-water-need desert mallow. This meant I had to separately water the buttonwillow tree, but avoid watering the desert mallow. Not a good thing. So the buttonwillow was moved to another section and a creosote bush was put in its place. Now everybody’s happy!

Just to explain the preparations involved, here’s a little of what happened. That section of garden in the previous year was only OK. The desert mallows, milkweed and *Baileya multiradiata* grew, while salvias and Matilija poppies croaked in the heat of the summer. I should have known conditions were less than ideal when they were planted in the first place, because the ground was very compacted and there was a two-inch layer of aged manure about a foot below the surface. (Remember, it used to be a horse pen.) When I pulled up the dead plants, the roots never went through the manure layer. In addition, the water didn’t percolate through the compacted dirt.

To remedy the situation, I dug giant holes where the natives would go the next fall. I dug down to the river sand about three feet below the surface, breaking up the compacted soil during the process. Then the holes were filled with the original soil, but now the previously compacted soil was mixed with the river sand and the texture was much improved. In addition, because of the soil preparation, the water actually percolates down instead of sitting on top of the soil.

Disclaimer: This is what worked for my garden’s unique issues. Digging up perfectly good dirt is not recommended because it disturbs the mycorrhiza.

I’ll keep you posted as the garden grows! 

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**Photos:** Monica Tudor