Gardening with Natives
Visiting
by Monica Tudor

A FEW WEEKS AGO I HAD AN INVITATION TO visit the California garden of another CNPS member, Dinah Campbell. We made arrangements for a Sunday afternoon visit and I drove to her home. As I turned on to Dinah’s street, I knew immediately which house was hers. The front yard was bordered by a magnificent California sycamore (Platanus racemosa) on one end and a beautiful desert willow (Chilopsis linearis) on the other. In between the two trees was a natural landscape that was amazing. I marveled at her front yard for at least five minutes before even going to the front door. It was certainly not a typical Bakersfield front yard. The whole impression reminded me of Santa Barbara or Davis. Just think…if even only half the front yards of Bakersfield were this inviting, it would be an even more wonderful place to live.

Dinah took me around her front yard and commented on each of the plants she was growing. Underneath the desert willow were some non-native wildflowers — red flax (Linum grandiflorum rubrum), and some gaura (Gaura lindheimeri). She had Penstemon BOP (Penstemon heterophyllus “Margarita BOP”, Santa Cruz island buckwheat (Eriogonum arborescens), manzanita, redbud (Cercis occidentalis), California fuchsia (Epilobium canum), sulphur buckwheat (Eriogonum umbellatum), blue-eyed grass (Sisyrinchium bellum) and orchid rockrose (Cistus x purpureus). The front yard had an entirely natural look, including boulders and rocks and a healthy layer of gorilla-hair mulch. And just to let any interested person know, she has a CNPS sign posted up front: “Native Plants Live Here”.

We went to the backyard to see what she had done there, and continued talking about her plants. Her backyard was equally as stunning as the front, although slightly more formal in tone. Dinah had divided her yard into multiple large areas, separated by paths. There were some pre-existing fruit trees throughout her back yard, along with moonshine yarrow (Achillea millefolium “moonshine”), scarlet bugler penstemon (Penstemon centranthifolius), St. Catherine’s lace (Eriogonum giganteum), more manzanita, desert mallow, artemisia, desert agave, some paddle cactus and some yuccas. Parts of the garden are mulched with pebbles and other parts have gorilla hair, while the cactus area is without mulch. The paths are crushed/decomposed granite and are lined with cobbles of various sizes. Dinah has designed her garden to showcase the variety of plants in an extraordinarily pleasing design.

Dinah and her husband began converting a traditional landscape to a xeriscape garden landscape shortly after they moved in, 12 years ago. As they learned the advantages of native plants, they added more and more natives. They experimented a lot and learned what grew the best with their soil and microclimates. She had her husband cut out some concrete between the house and the pool and turned it into a planted area. I would have never thought of removing such a permanent thing as concrete. She has an eye for form and rhythm, so I asked Dinah if she had “design” in her DNA. She laughed and said no at first, but then commented that she is a graphic designer. (She puts this newsletter together!)

Thank you, Dinah, for sharing your stunning gardens with me. They are peaceful and inspirational, beautiful examples of amazing designs done with native plants. ✽