

President's Message: Some Botanical Oddities in the Kern County Flora

by Rich Spjut, President

DOES KERN COUNTY HAVE ANY UNUSUAL or endemic shrubs or trees, other than the Paiute Cypress? The Fort Tejon woolly sunflower — which I have yet to see — is an example of a sub-shrub variety, *Eriophyllum lanatum* var. *hallii*, that differs from related species in having opposite less-divided leaves; it is found only in our county, near Fort Tejon in the Tehachapi Mountains. What I find interesting are some of the distinctive oddities that really don't fit into the species descriptions in the floras.

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One example is a square-stemmed *Ephedra* (joint fir) in the Caliente region. This has the kind of characteristic one might think that a botanist would not miss in describing species of *Ephedra*, but I did not see square stems mentioned for any of the joint firs described in the *Flora of North America*. After all, botanists are trained to recognize square stems as an important character feature for the mint family (*Lamiaceae*), and also for *Scrophularia californica* (*Scrophulariaceae*).



Photo courtesy Richard Spjut

Square-stemmed joint fir. Not only is this *Ephedra* odd in having square stems, but also in having stems that hardly branch, and frequently change their direction of growth at many of the joints (nodes). — Southern end of the Paiute Mountains in the Caliente region, near Stevenson Peak, May 5, 2010.

A second example is the raised veins on the upper surface of the leaves on an oak found above Bear Valley Springs in the Tehachapi Mountains. Conspicuous veins on oak leaves are usually impressed into the upper surface, not raised above it. Thus, one might think that such an odd feature should be mentioned in species descriptions; but again I did not see that character feature in a quick review of the *Quercus* species descriptions in the *Flora of North America*.

A third example is buckbrush in the *Ceanothus cuneatus* complex that occurs south of Lake Isabella in Squirrel Canyon — one that has a fruit with a blistered cup. In this genus, especially in some of the more complex species such as *C. cuneatus*, one can tolerate more exceptions, although



Photo by Richard Spjut with Dore Giragoshian

Leaves and acorn cup of an oak (*Quercus*, possibly a hybrid, *Quercus wislizenii* x *john-tuckeri*, — above Bear Valley Springs, April 18, 2012. This oak has leaf varicose veins, unlike other species in the genus. Interior live oak (*Q. wislizenii*) has conspicuous veins usually flush with the upper surface, whereas the John-Tucker oak usually does not have conspicuous veins, but instead is recognized by the contorted leaves. Assuming that the two crossed, the result might be as described and shown here.



Photo by Richard Spjut

Young fruits of buckbrush, *Ceanothus cuneatus* complex, the whole fruit appearing as if in bubble wrap. Usually only the upper part, which comes off like a lid at maturity, is sometimes bubbly. This is another one of Kern County's strange shrubs. — Squirrel Canyon, south of Lake Isabella, May 23, 2014.

President's Message (continued)

some do occasionally get named such as varieties that are recognized near the coast: var. *fascicularis* in San Luis Obispo County, var. *dubius* in the Santa Cruz Mountains, var. *rigidus* and var. *ramulosus* in Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties.

For those who may be wondering that if the Kern County oddities are really that different, why not just give them a name? One also needs to look at lots of herbarium specimens, not only of plants collected in Kern County, but throughout the range of the species. Our Kern County *Ceanothus* includes *C. vestitus*, originally described from plants that grow in the mountains above Tehachapi. It has been linked to another species that originally was described from plants that grow in northern mainland Mexico, *C. greggii*, one that has been interpreted to have many varieties between the two type locations, generally distinguished by leaf characters. Thus, that would require looking at many specimens and the types for many of the varietal names generally not available to me.

Native Gardening Notes: Late Summer, Early Fall

by Monica Tudor



Butterfly bush,
(*Buddleia davidii*) bloom

I LOVE THIS TIME OF YEAR. THE WEATHER IS cooling off slightly — I was just commenting that only in Bakersfield does a 95-degree day in August seem cool; at least when compared to the string of over-100 degree days we have had this year.

The hummingbirds have begun their southward migrations. The yard and California garden are thick with them. Even before seeing the numbers increase, I can tell they are on the move because the feeders

need to be filled daily. That is a labor I love! The birds don't seem to have favorites. They'll go after the feeders as eagerly as they do the flowers, although at the moment there is not an abundance of flowers blooming.



Photos courtesy Monica Tudor

Lipstick sage (*Salvia greggii*)

Autumn sage (*Salvia greggii*), desert marigold (*Baileya multiradiata*), western or pacific aster (*Aster chiliensis* or *occidentalis*), Texas Ranger (*Leucophyllum frutescens*), and butterfly bush (*Buddleia davidii*) are all blooming. Yes, I know they are not all natives, but

they fit into one

or more of the garden's requirements: they are either drought-tolerant, or native, attract hummingbirds and butterflies, or act as a host plant for butterflies. The fact that they are blooming in spite of the extreme summer weather reveals how hardy they are!

Even the plant that went summer dormant is starting to show new growth. The May Night salvia was a crispy brown mess but now is starting to grow new leaves.

Every year I look forward to the bloom period of the California fuchsias in my garden. They are planted in different parts of the garden, so their appearance varies quite a bit. The plant in sand is easily three feet tall and wide. This plant gets more water than the others, yet because of the well-draining sand can tolerate it. Last year the blooms were so heavy the plant almost flopped down. What a nice problem to have! The other two are in "fighting" shape. They are more sparsely leaved and not nearly as large, since they make do with much less water. Their soil is a bit more clayey, so when they get too much summer water, their leaves will die off, a lesson learned by trial and error. I've learned the best way to get those fuchsias through the summer is to water nearby plants. Ap-