

Landscaping with California Native Plants

By Cathie Tritel, Landscape Designer

Did you know that our beautiful California natives can satisfy many landscaping needs—as accents, backgrounds, foundations, specimens, massing, and much more? Native plants also provide food and habitat for native animals such as birds and butterflies.

Accent plants are used to attract attention to a feature of the landscape or architecture that is pleasing or important. Areas of emphasis and focal points are achieved by using abrupt changes in plant texture, color, and form. They are often the plants which most enliven one's landscape.

In the residential setting, the front **entryway** should be announced by guiding views toward the front door. This is often accomplished by **framing**—placing two of the same plant on either side of the door. (Keep in mind that the plants must be in scale.) For less formality, asymmetry can be utilized.

Funneling is another technique used to spotlight an entry. Plantings along the foundation of the house gradually decline from the corners to the front door, then an abrupt change to a taller plant next to the front door accents the door.

Views also call out for accenting. For example, use an arbor with a showy vine to frame a distant view of the mountains or forest.

When used in mass, plants with colorful flowers help to create accent areas.

TALL

Cercis occidentalis, Western Redbud. Deciduous tree. Rose-purple flowers in spring. 6–18' H x 8–15' W. Drought-tolerant. Sun or shade.

Fremontodendron spp., Flannelbush. Evergreen shrub. Showy yellow flowers. 6–20' H x 10–15' W. Sun.

Arctostaphylos 'Sentinel', Manzanita. Evergreen shrub. 6' H x 8' W. Tall, open growth. Shade.

Carpenteria californica, California Bush Anemone. Evergreen shrub. Showy white flowers. 3'–10' H. Shade.

Garrya fremontii, Mountain Silktassel. Evergreen shrub. To 10' H. Sun.

Woodwardia fimbriata, Giant Chain Fern. Fronds are large. 7' H x 4' W. Water. Part sun to full shade.

MEDIUM

Lupinus albilfrons, Bush or Silver Lupine. Perennial/subshrub. Blue-purple flowers. 3' H x 3' W. Drought-tolerant. Sun or shade.

Muhlenbergia rigens, Deergrass. Perennial grass. 3' H with 6' flowers. Dense clumps. Sun or shade.

Ribes aureum, Golden Currant. Deciduous shrub. Yellow flowers; berries. 3–6' H. Shade.

Fallugia paradoxa, Apache Plume. Semi-evergreen shrub. White flowers; feathery fruit. 3–5' H. Sun.

Romneya coulteri, Matilija Poppy. Perennial/subshrub. Huge white flowers. 4–8' H. Sun.

Salvia clevelandii, Cleveland Sage. Evergreen shrub. Gray foliage, lavender flowers. 4' H. Sun.

Salvia apiana, White Sage. Evergreen shrub. Striking white foliage. 3' H. Sun.

LOW

Yucca whipplei, Our Lord's Candle. Perennial. Low with tall flowers. Bold accent. Sun.

Delphinium variegatum, Royal Larkspur. Perennial used in mass to create an accent area. Blue and white flowers. 10–24" H. Sun.

VINES

Aristolochia californica, Dutchman's Pipe. Deciduous. Unusual cream flowers. 8' H x 12' W. Drought-tolerant. Sun or shade.

Lonicera hispidula, Hairy Honeysuckle. Deciduous. White to scarlet flowers. 20' H, sprawling. Sun or shade.

Specimen plants are those which have strong visual qualities and characteristic symmetry so that they may be planted alone. They look good at all times of the year. Often they are evergreen.

TALL

Calocedrus decurrens, Incense Cedar. Evergreen tree. Narrow. Symmetrical. 80' H x 12–50' W. Sun or shade.

Heteromeles arbutifolia, Toyon. Evergreen shrub. 7–35' H. Dense; attractive berries. Sun or shade.

Prunus ilicifolia, Hollyleaf Cherry. Evergreen shrub/tree. 10–40' H x 10' W. Sun or shade.

Umbellularia californica, California Bay.

Evergreen tree. 25+' H. Fragrant leaves. Sun or shade.

Quercus douglasii, Blue Oak. Deciduous tree. 20–50' H x 20' W. Acorns provide food for wildlife. Sun.

Lithocarpus densiflora, Tanbark Oak. Evergreen tree. 75' H x 20' W. Oak-type tree. Shade.

Arctostaphylos manzanita 'Dr. Hurd'. Evergreen shrub. 15' H x 20' W. Pure white flowers, mahogany bark. Sun.

MEDIUM

Amelanchier alnifolia, Pacific Serviceberry.

Deciduous shrub. 3–20' H. Abundant apple-like flowers. Shade.

Corylus cornuta californica, California Hazelnut.

Deciduous shrub. 5–12' H x 9' W. Horizontally tiered, pagoda-like branches. Good near creeks.

Rhododendron occidentale, Western Azalea.

6–10' H and W. Bronze to flame-orange leaves in fall. Umbrella-like tiers of twigs. Water. Shade.

Massing plants are those which do not have strong enough visual characteristics to stand alone. They are best suited to being planted in odd numbers and in groups of three or more and help to create balance, sequence, and scale. They can be used to cover large areas of ground, including banks. A large massing of plants with colorful flowers can create an accent area.

TALL

Ceanothus cuneatus, Buckbrush. Evergreen shrub. Small leaves; white or blue flowers. To 10' H x 6–10' W. Deer resistant. Sun.

Ceanothus 'Ray Hartman'. Evergreen shrub. Large, dark green leaves; dark blue flowers. Can be trained as a small tree. 12–20' H x 15–20' W. Sun or shade.

MEDIUM

Arctostaphylos 'Howard McMinn', Manzanita. Evergreen shrub. Rose-pink flowers. 4' H x 7' W. Shade.

Muhlenbergia rigens, Deergrass. Also an accent.

Symphoricarpos albus, Snowberry. White berries attractive to birds. 2–6' H. Shade. Woodland gardens.

Elymus glaucus, Blue Wildrye. Attractive perennial grass. 2–4' H. Sun or shade.

Polystichum munitum, Sword Fern. Evergreen fern. 2–4' H and W. Hardy. Dry shade. Woodland gardens.

Low

Arctostaphylos uva ursi cvs., **Bearberry.** Evergreen shrub. Low, prostrate. Pink bell flowers; berries.

Baccharis pilularis 'Twin Peaks', Dwarf Coyote Bush. Evergreen groundcover shrub. 8–24" H x 6' W. Tiny leaves. Great for under oaks. Shade or sun.

Ceanothus gloriosus 'Pt. Reyes'. Evergreen shrub groundcover. Blue flowers. 4–24" H x 5' W. Good on banks.

Epilobium canum, California Fuchsia. Perennial/subshrub with orange tubular flowers. 1–3' H and W. Sun or shade.

Sisyrinchium bellum, Blue-eyed Grass. Perennial good for naturalizing. 4–12" H. Sun or shade.

Sources of Additional Information and Suppliers of California Native Plants

Carol Bornstein, David Fross, & Bart O'Brien. *California Native Plants for the Garden*. Cachuma Press, 2005.

Glenn Keator. *Complete Garden Guide to the Native Shrubs of California*. Chronicle Books, 1994.

Marjorie Schmidt. *Growing California Native Plants*. UC Press, 1980.

Las Pilitas Nursery www.laspilitas.com
Over 5,000 pages of information, including extensive beginner and advanced manuals for working with California native plants in landscapes and restorations, based on 35 years of experience; lots of color pictures.

California Native Plant Society www.cnps.org
Extensive list of native plant nurseries and other resources on the Horticulture page.

Peaceful Valley Farm and Garden Supply
Grass Valley • 530-272-4769 • www.GrowOrganic.com

Far West Bulb Farm
Grass Valley • www.californianativebulbs.com

California Native Grasslands Association
www.cnga.org

California Invasive Plant Council
www.cal-ipc.org

Don't plant a pest. Information about garden plants that "jump the fence" and invade natural areas, displacing native species and altering natural processes. These invasive plants are serious wildland weeds that threaten California's biodiversity and economy.