

March 9, 2016



Gardening with California Native Plants
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Spring is a good time to evaluate your landscape and make potential changes to lessen 2016's water use. A good starting point is to incorporate a California native plant or two into the garden. Many native plants can survive with minimal supplemental water once they have become established.

It is important to note that California includes many different native plant communities. Native plants come from across the state and are adapted to varying habitat conditions that include coastal, inland, foothill and desert. The natives for ornamental plantings in El Dorado County are best if of local origin that are adapted to our soil and microclimate conditions. These local natives will also attract local wildlife according to Ellen Zagory, the director of public horticulture at the UC Davis Arboretum.

The local natives are food sources for wildlife as well as shelter from weather and predators and offer nesting sites. The winter native garden is home to a variety of resident and migrating bird species. Winter blooming plants provide nectar and pollen for residents like hummingbirds and native bees. Two native shrubs that offer berries for birds are Toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*) and Oregon Grape (*Berberis aquifolium*). Redbud (*Cercis occidentalis*) offers seeds and spectacular spring flowers. Native oaks provide acorns and host a wide variety of insects eaten by birds. Hummingbirds are drawn to the red flowers of California Fuchsia (*Epilobium canum*) and the lovely blooms of the Red Flowering Currant (*Ribes sanguineum*).

Native plants from appropriate plant communities can mix with other plants from similar climates with like water requirements. Natives should not be planted near a lawn, or with plants that have high water needs. Very good drainage and careful watering the first year, along with planting a bit above grade so water percolates away from the crown of the plant help insure success. Native plants should go in native soil, be watered deeply and infrequently once they are established.

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An excellent source of information on natives for El Dorado County is the Native Garden located within the Sherwood Demonstration Garden in Placerville. The Native Garden focuses on native plants that grow locally and are “garden worthy.” In addition, the garden is completely pesticide and fertilizer free. The Sherwood Demonstration Garden reopens for the 2016 season in early April. However, to get started before then there is a comprehensive list of native plants on the Sherwood Demonstration Garden website that includes appropriate ground covers, ornamental grasses, perennials, shrubs, trees, vines and even a succulent, Pacific Stonecrop (*Sedum spathulifolium*). The site for the Sherwood Demonstration Garden is http://ucanr.edu/uccemgedc_sdg. From there click on the Individual Gardens Gateway and choose the Native Garden.

Today, March 9th, UCCE Master Gardener Catherine Monet will teach a free class, Gardening with Native Plants, from 9:00 a.m to noon at the Cameron Park Community Center, 2502 Country Club Lane in Cameron Park. Join the growing movement of gardeners who are creating beautiful yards that provide habitat for pollinators and wildlife, and learn to select appropriate foothill natives that need very little water once established.

On Saturday, March 12th, UCCE Master Gardener Sharlett Elms will teach the popular free class: Beekeeping for the Backyard. Want to do something to improve your gardens and help the world at the same time? Consider keeping bees! This class introduces beekeeping in your backyard, explain the current state of bees, how bees affect your everyday life, and the process of maintaining a hive or two. The class will also give you some resources for getting started. Class is from 9:00 a.m. to noon at the Veterans Memorial Building, 130 Placerville Drive in Placerville.

Save the date! UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County Spring Plant Sale is Saturday, April 23rd from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville.

UCCE Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmg>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.