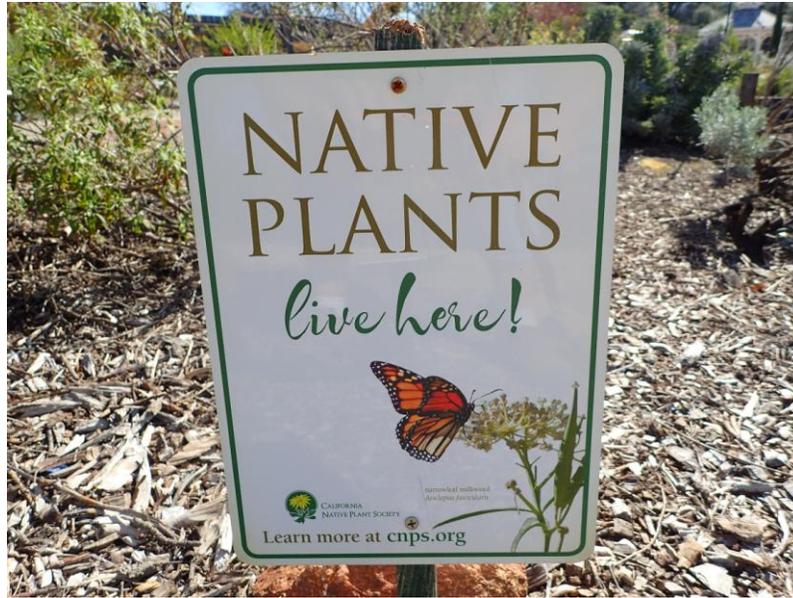


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Establishing Native Plants
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You've decided to add the beauty of native plants to your garden, bought ones that are well suited to your area, and are ready to sit back and relax. Everyone says that "once established," they'll need little or no water. But wait - how exactly do you do that?

The key is to get your new natives in the ground in fall or even early winter, when winter rains will do some of the work for you. (If you bought your plants in spring, consider leaving them in their pots till fall.) Dig a hole that is about twice as wide as the root ball, but the same depth. Then water your plant well - really well. Thoroughly saturate the soil (without leaving standing water) and let that be it. If no rain comes in the first month, you might want to repeat the process. Otherwise, let the cool wet weather take over.

If, like nearly everyone else in the county, you have visiting deer, you'll need to protect your transplant. You've put this nice plant, juicy from nursery care, in the ground right at the time deer are especially hungry. Even deer resistant plants need protection their first year or two. A wire cage is a good defense, just make sure the cage is anchored against pushy deer.

Come spring, when there are long dry spells of a few weeks, you still shouldn't have to worry about watering your plant. The plant will have started spreading its roots underground to find water.

But now comes the critical period - the plant's first summer. Starting in May, you need to pay attention again. Before it gets really hot and dry, you'll want to start watering your new transplants about once a week. If it has been a very wet winter and you have a plant like flannel bush (*Fremontodendron*) or matilija poppy (*Romneya coulteri*) that especially hate summer water, you might want to stretch that to every two weeks.

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You have to be careful though. Native plants are not adapted to having hot wet roots in summer. It's best to water very early in the morning (a nice time to be out anyway!). It's also a good idea to spray the leaves a bit to wash the dust off, just like a brief summer thunderstorm would do. Hand watering can also be much better for natives, assuming you are consistent and don't neglect them. Drip irrigation can actually be harmful to many natives.

When the cooler weather of fall comes back, you can cut back to watering every two weeks or so, and then stop and let the rainy weather take over again.

The second summer, the rule of thumb is to double the time between waterings, to about every two weeks for most plants. Again, water early in the morning and briefly spray the leaves.

By the following spring, your plants should be well established. There should be robust new spring growth, and they might be about twice as big as when you planted them. Underground roots will have spread far beyond the original rootball. <http://calscape.org> is a good website to check for water needs of established California natives. WUCOLS (Water Use Classification of Landscape Species) plant search database can also be found at ucanr.edu/sites/WUCOLS/Plant_Search. Natives that say "low" water use will need water every 3-4 weeks, while those that say "very low" should need no water at all. And those plants that these websites say need no water? they need just that - no water.

This is the ideal scenario. It's easy to kill an established native plant, or to shorten its life, by overwatering. Western redbud (*Cercis occidentalis*) is a perfect example of a plant that will be short lived if you water it. Established Western Redbuds, with no summer water, can live decades - unlike the Eastern Redbud which requires regular water.

Now, you really can enjoy the fruits of your labor. Don't fertilize your native plants, and keep pruning to a minimum in most cases. One notable exception is California Fuchsia (*Epilobium canum*) which takes well to severe fall pruning. Consult the calscape.org website for pruning advice for specific plants.

The last step? Get bird, butterfly, and other nature books, and welcome your new neighbors!

The upcoming Master Gardeners public education class will be "What to plant after tree loss." Join us on Saturday, September 23 at the Government Hearing Room, Bldg C, 2850 Fairlane Ct, Placerville. El Dorado County is one of 10 California counties affected by massive tree die off due to bark beetles. Now that the trees are gone, homeowners are wondering what to plant next and should they even replant conifers. Master Gardeners will present next steps and ideas that individuals can take on their property. Classes are free and 9am to noon unless otherwise noted.

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). 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://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news. You can also find us on Facebook.