



Drought Tolerant California Native Plants  
By Kit Smith  
UCCE Master Gardener of El Dorado County

The definition of a drought tolerant plant is one that has adapted to dry conditions by changes in its stomata, water storage or root systems. These adaptations have produced plants that can survive and thrive in our present conditions. A California native plant is one that grew here before European explorers arrived, has evolved over time and was both used and depended on by native Californians.

Some native plants that are also drought tolerant may be very familiar to most Sierra foothills gardeners. Erigeron or Fleabane is a perennial daisy of threadlike rays in a single row that flowers in the spring, summer and fall. It attracts butterflies and beneficial insects. Coral Bells is a pink groundcover that prefers shade and has colorful foliage and bell-shaped flowers. Deer Grass is a narrow-leafed grass that needs no maintenance. It is an evergreen in mild winter areas. Penstemon can thrive in any garden condition, but it is short lived. Penstemon hybrids are easier to grow, but the wild ones do better in droughts.

Salvia attracts hummingbirds, and some have a fruity fragrance. Its flowers grow on a spike and come in all colors. Salvia does best with a once-a-month deep watering in the heat of the summer. Fremontodendron or Flannel Bush blooms showy bright yellow flowers in spring. Give it room to stretch in higher elevations and plant against a sunny wall for warmth. It is excellent for hillside planting, as its roots are shallow. It also does not have a long lifespan.

The matilija poppy is also known as the fried egg plant for its crepe paper-like white petal with yellow center bloom. It is six inches in diameter making it the largest of any California native. This poppy has the bonus of being deer resistant. Yarrow or Achillea can live through droughts, blooming all through the summer. Give it room to spread or divide the Yarrow when it gets crowded. Ideal for native grass meadows is the California goldenrod with its small bright yellow flowers. It thrives in any not-too-rich soil.

All gardeners are welcome to attend free UCCE Master Gardener Saturday classes. This Saturday's class is "Native Plants and Critters in the Garden." Find out how your beautiful and productive garden and yard can also be a certified National Wildlife haven. The three hour class starts at 9:00 a.m., in the Veterans Memorial Building, 130 Placerville Drive, Placerville.

Master Gardeners seek your opinion on where, when, and what subjects should be taught at their free public education gardening classes. Help them understand how to best serve our community by filling out a brief online survey at <http://bit.ly/1qCsRIId>. Paper copies of the survey are also available at the Master Gardener office.

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions at Farmer's Markets and from Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome. The office is located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at [http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Master\\_Gardeners/](http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Master_Gardeners/) and you can also find us on Facebook.