

September 30, 2015



Native by Design  
Landscaping with Native Plant Species  
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Are you one of the many gardeners turning towards native plants? Do you want to save water, have an easy care garden, and stop spending so much on pesticides and fertilizer?

But just how do you go about designing a beautiful garden with natives? It's really not all that different from designing other gardens. It's best not to rush out, buy plants, and then try to figure out what to do with them! So, sit down and plan awhile.

First, you need to determine the intent of your garden. Most people want something that has curb appeal. Try standing out front, really look around and think.

Also consider having something pretty to look at when you look out from various rooms in your house. Maybe you want to be able to view wildlife from your dining room, or maybe your garden will be for recreation, quiet contemplation, entertaining, or cut flowers. Or?

Now that you know what you want from your garden, it's time to evaluate your site. It's best to create a plot map, preferably to scale. Which direction does your garden(s) face: north, south, or west? Where does rain flow over or through your property? What is the surrounding vegetation? What is your elevation? What is the soil like, and are there areas that are different than others? And what about the history of your site: did grazing occur, or dredging activities? Is fire hazard significant?

The next step is to place hardscape on your plot map. This can be fun; feel free to develop various plans. Where would a welcoming walk to your front door go best and where else should there be walkways? Place too any patios, arbors, water features, utility areas, etc. Hard scape does not take any water, and can add nice structure to your garden.

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Now you're ready to really focus on your native plant design. It's time to select the plant communities you will use, and color those areas onto your plot map.

Why plant communities? Because grouping native plants by their natural communities can help make your garden successful and low maintenance. If you put the plants that grow in oak woodlands together, for example, you have a natural grouping of similar water users, capitalize on healthy soil interactions (read up on mycorrhizae!) and help create a sense of place. As an example: putting plants like Toyon, Live Oak, and Manzanita together works better than putting Toyon, Redwood, and poppies together. Plant communities that work particularly well in our county, depending on your elevation, are: oak woodland, valley grassland, chaparral, and mixed conifer.

Now the fun part starts -- choosing plants! Focus first on the trees, and then the shrubs. Don't plant them too close to your house (fire safety!) or too close together. Two excellent online resources are: [arboretum.ucdavis.edu/plant\\_search.aspx](http://arboretum.ucdavis.edu/plant_search.aspx) and [calscape.com](http://calscape.com)

As you place the trees on your plot map, consider how they will affect your house. It's generally a good idea to put deciduous trees on the south and west side, for summer shade and cooling, while allowing the low winter sun to provide heat to your home once the leaves have fallen. Evergreen trees make more sense on the north side, where they can even block winter winds.

With the trees and shrubs placed, you can have fun filling in your design with the smaller perennials, and finally annual wildflowers. Try and stay true to your plant communities, and consider providing flower color in spring, summer, and fall. For example, as spring flowers like Baby Blue Eyes and poppies fade, summer and fall bloomers like California fuchsia (*Epilobium canum*) and Golden rod (*Solidago californica*) can keep your native garden in color, and continue to provide for native pollinators as well.

This is just a brief introduction. There are several books in the library that can help you plan a beautiful native garden!

The Sherwood Demonstration Garden behind Folsom College – El Dorado Center in Placerville, includes sixteen different gardens created by local UCCE Master Gardeners. One of the gardens is comprised entirely of native plants, and there are native plants in several other gardens as well. Come take a look October 3 at our grand opening and get ideas! The Grand opening is from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., is free to the public, and there will be refreshments and prizes at 6699 Campus Drive.

If you can't make the grand opening, the demonstration garden will also be open throughout October on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., and will re-open again starting in April 2016.

UC Davis Arboretum native plant sales will be Oct. 10, 24 and Nov. 14; more information at <http://arboretum.ucdavis.edu/directions.aspx>. The local California Native Plant Society sale will be Oct. 3 across from Placerville library at Govt. Bldg. B. All sales are 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

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UCCE Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions at local farmers markets, and 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.