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Seasonal Color with California Bulbs  
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The slender leaves of crocuses are peeking up through the pine needles in my lower foothills garden. A host of local native bulbs—or more accurately, perennial plants that store energy in bulbs, corms, or rhizomes—will grace our hills and valleys with wildflowers throughout the spring and summer.

We Californians enjoy one of only five Mediterranean climates in the world, with mild, wet winters and hot, dry summers. Over 6,500 native plant species are spread throughout California's extremely diverse geologic domains. These plants support the soil biota, insects, birds, and other animals that define the ecoscape we call home. Most of these natives (except riparian plants) have evolved to withstand long periods of drought, and although we enjoyed a nice, wet winter this year, California is historically a drought-prone environment. By studying tree rings, scientists have found that 37 of the last 40 centuries in California have been exceptionally dry, with the past 150 years being some of the wettest in 7,000 years. It is estimated that 70% of household water is used in landscaping, so in a long-term drought-prone environment where water is a precious resource, it behooves us as gardeners to use plants, such as native bulbs, that have evolved to perform well in dry gardens. These plants need no fertilizer, and provide nourishment for important native insects, birds, and other animals.

Native bulbs represent a subset of the grouping we call monocotyledons (monocots) that send up a single, often blade-shaped, first leaf. Other garden monocots you might easily recognize are grasses and succulents. We contrast these with dicotyledons—dicots--which propagate with paired first leaves. It's easy to see our Sierra foothills as prime terrain for native grasses and some hardy succulents, but we're also lucky to have a broad array of native flowering bulbs. Many varieties of Alliums, Brodiaea, Calochortus, Irises, Lilies, Orchids, and Trillium provide seasonal color that delights us on spring and summer hikes. Some of these plants can be grown by home gardeners, and a few will naturalize over time, with patience and the right sun and soil environment.

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Please join us on Wednesday, March 8, from 9:00 a.m. – noon at the Cameron Park Community Center, 2502 Country Club Drive, CP for a free class on Seasonal Color with California Bulbs. Learn to identify the most common regional native bulbs, the growth and propagation characteristics of different bulbs, suggested sources for plant materials, and tips for choosing plants that will be successful in your home garden. We'll talk about bulbs for about an hour and a half, after which those who are interested can stay to discuss gardening with native plants in general. Class is free.

There is a different, and also exciting, topic to be covered on Saturday, March 4. Heidi Napier will share all you need to know about backyard chickens. She will cover choosing and raising chicks, behavior, handling, nutrition and health problems in small flocks. This class will be held at the Government Center Hearing Room, Building C, 2850 Fairlane Drive, Placerville from 9:00 – noon. Class is free.

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. 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.