



VOLUME 20, NO. 4  
FALL 2013

## CALIFORNIA NATIVE SHRUBS FOR FALL PLANTING

**Peggy Just Peterson**  
Placer County  
Master Gardener

The days are shorter, the evenings are chilly, and there's that fall feel in the air! Fall is my favorite time of year, because it's the best time of year to plant trees and shrubs, especially California natives. The warm days, cool nights and increasing rains ease the transition of the plants' roots into the native soil of the garden, establishing a good start before real cold sets in. And when it starts to warm up in spring, those roots will really be at home, ready to support hearty new growth well before the heat of summer arrives.

Whether planning a new flower bed or updating your landscape, it's worth thinking about using California native plants. Many native plants evolved to thrive in our foothill climate, and look

beautiful and natural here. Natives can also provide a transition from landscapes full of imported plants to wilder areas of our landscapes or neighborhoods.

### Other reasons to grow natives include:

- Native plants are attractive to native pollinators, which improve pollination rates for other plants in your landscape, including fruits and vegetables.
- Many natives attract birds, beneficial insects, and other wildlife, improving and diversifying the ecology of our neighborhoods.
- Because natives are adapted to our environment, they require less coddling, needing fewer pesticides and fertilizers, and less pruning than fussier imports.
- Natives also mix beautifully with many of the popular non-natives available in local nurseries or already planted in our landscapes. *(Continued on page 2)*

### Attention Subscribers! LAST PRINTED ISSUE

Effective January 2014, The Curious Gardener newsletter is transitioning to an **online newsletter**, available only in electronic format.

If you are currently receiving a hard copy of the newsletter in the mail, please log on to <http://ucanr.edu/curiousgardener> to change your subscription to electronic delivery. Thank you!

## INSIDE

|                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Bulletin Board                      | 4 |
| Berryland                           | 5 |
| Artfully Balancing Plants and Rocks | 7 |
| Calendar of Events                  |   |

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THE CURIOUS GARDENER

...A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION AND THE UC MASTER GARDENERS OF PLACER AND NEVADA COUNTIES

**Right Plant, Right Place**

A common misconception is that all California native plants are drought tolerant. Many are, but if you think of the incredible diversity of ecosystems in California, you'll realize that natives can be adapted not only to our local foothill regions, but to harsh deserts; cool, moist coasts; high mountains; and everything in between. So, when planning to incorporate natives, we still have to be aware of choosing the right plant for the right place. This means not only paying attention to the amount of sun the plant will get, but how and how often you will provide supplemental water.

One of the most important concepts of sustainable landscaping is grouping plants together by their summer water needs – this is called *hydrozoning*. In my yard, there are separate planting areas for those that need water regularly (e.g. once a week), those that need it less often (every 10-14 days), those that need occasional water (every 3-4 weeks) and those that get no supplemental water at all. This allows me to have a variety of plants whose varying needs all get met, and it saves money on my water bill.

During drought years, you may need to consider supplemental watering during the fall, winter and spring, too. Remember that watering needs vary considerably depending on the weather; automated systems that measure the soil moisture can help remove the guesswork. And don't forget to mulch – not only will this conserve soil moisture, it will moderate soil temperature, reduce the formation of a soil crust, slow down erosion, and suppress weeds.

Regardless of the eventual water needs of your California natives, all require extra watering the first few years in the landscape. Once they are well-established, update your watering habits to meet their needs.

The following suggestions are just a few of the many wonderful California natives that do well in our foothill gardens. Check the references for more options, and plan to attend some of the fall plant sales to see what plants appeal to you, to get further information, and to buy plants for your fall planting extravaganza!

*Arctostaphylos* (manzanita)

There are many species of this evergreen shrub suited to the foothills and valleys.

*A. densiflora* 'Howard McMinn' is a favorite, growing from 5-8 feet tall and just as wide.



Its urn-shaped, white flowers are followed by the tiny, apple-like fruit that give it its common name (manzanita is Spanish for "little apple"). Manzanitas require full sun to light shade, excellent drainage, and can tolerate poor or rocky soil. Once established, they need water once a month or so.

*Calycanthus occidentalis* (spicebush)

Spicebush is a deciduous, 5-8 foot shrub that is native along streams in our foothills. Both its springtime maroon flowers and bright green leaves are fragrant. It likes sun to partial shade, can tolerate most soils, and needs regular water.

*Carpenteria californica* (bush anemone)

This showy evergreen is slow-growing to 5-8 feet tall and wide, with lightly fragrant, white flowers in the spring. It tolerates ordinary garden soil, partial shade in lower, hotter elevations, with little to moderate water.

*Ceanothus* (wild lilac)

This is another evergreen shrub with many species to choose from. Ranging from groundcovers to small trees, they are stunning in late winter or spring, covered in blue or white flowers. Smaller-leaved varieties are less attractive to deer, and all attract a wide variety of birds and beneficial insects. They need well-drained soil, full sun and prefer **no** summer water once established. Some varieties tolerate summer water, but it may shorten their lifespan.

*Cercis occidentalis* (western redbud)

This beautiful, deciduous shrub (or small tree) bursts into brilliant pink bloom in early spring. It grows 10-20 feet tall and wide, and produces interesting seedpods that attract birds. It requires good drainage and little to occasional summer water.

*Frangula californica* (formerly *Rhamnus*) (coffeeberry)

Coffeeberry is a pretty, evergreen plant that adapts to multiple environments, making it a good choice for a site that changes from sun to shade during the day or season. It grows 4-10 feet tall and wide, and has inconspicuous flowers that attract a host of beneficial insects. Its lovely fruit changes from green to red to burgundy during the summer, and attracts birds. Site this plant carefully, as the fruit can stain patios and paths. (Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

*Fremontodendron californicum*  
(fremontia)

These fast-growing evergreen shrubs have spectacular spring shows of yellow flowers that can obscure their leaves. While most are large, up to 20 feet tall, some hybrids are much smaller. They need good drainage, full sun and **no** summer water. They have shallow roots and may need staking in windy areas. Not as long-lived as other plants, but they bloom even when young and are truly gorgeous.



*Philadelphus lewisii* (western mock orange)

This deciduous, fountain-shaped shrub grows 4-10 feet tall and at least that wide. Its white, spring blossoms smell lusciously like citrus flowers. It likes sun to partial shade, good soil and drainage, and moderate water.

*Rosa californica* (California wild rose)

California has several species of wild rose that make perfect additions to a landscape. *R. californica* produces fragrant pink 5-petaled blossoms in spring; the stems can be quite spiny, so you may want to use it as a hedge or in an easily-weeded spot.

After blooming, it produces small reddish fruit called *hips* that are attractive to birds. 3-6 feet tall and wide, it is quite easy to grow, with few of the demands of hybrid roses. It needs full sun to part shade, and very little water, although it can tolerate regular watering.

*Ribes sanguineum* (flowering currant)

This deciduous shrub has clusters of showy pink or red blossoms in spring, followed by edible blue-black berries that birds love. It can grow 12 feet tall and needs partial shade in our climate. While it is quite drought tolerant, it looks better with occasional water.

*Ribes viburnifolium* (Catalina perfume)

This species of *Ribes* is evergreen and only gets about 3 feet tall. It is wonderful as a groundcover under oaks, and has the added benefit of leaves with a lovely fragrance! Its stems are a dark red, and tend to root where they touch the ground.

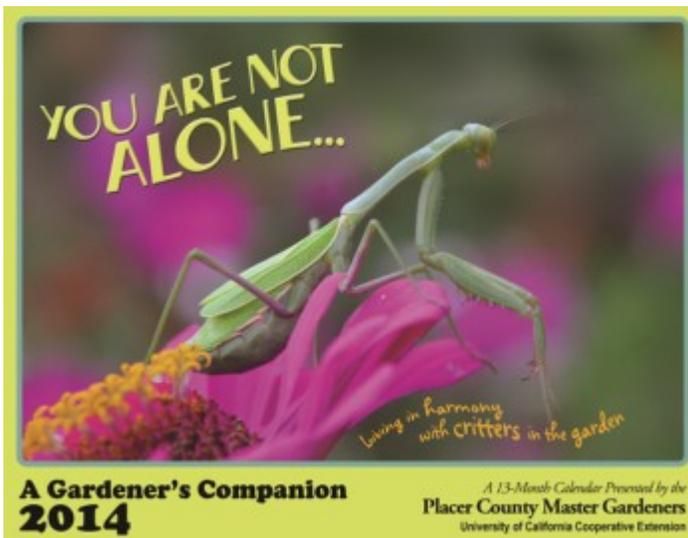
Its pink springtime blossoms aren't particularly showy, but its leathery leaves, delicious fragrance and ease of care make up for that. It needs partial shade in really hot areas, and little to no water.

**References:**

***The New Sunset Western Garden Book. 2012. Brenzel, Time Home Entertainment Inc.***

***California Native Plants for the Garden. 2005. Bornstein, Fross and O'Brien, Cachuma Press.***

***California Native Plant Society,***  
<http://www.cnps.org/>.



*It's here!!* The 2014 Placer County Master Gardener Calendar has arrived and is on sale now! For online purchasing and more information, visit our website at <http://pcmg.ucanr.org/>

## BULLETIN BOARD

The UCCE Nevada County Master Gardeners invite you!

# Fall Plant Sale

WHEN: Saturday, October 12, 2013

TIME: 9am to Noon

WHERE: Demonstration Garden (on NID Grounds)  
1036 West Main St. Grass Valley

(NOTE: Payment by CASH or CHECK only)

Many plants to choose from including vegetables, herbs,  
perennials, CA native plants and more!

Sierra College Community Education

<http://www.sccommed.org/>

### Establishing a Small Vineyard

2 sessions: October 22 (Tues) and October 24 (Thurs)

6pm-9pm both dates

Tuition—\$64.00

Materials Cost—\$40.00

Location—Secret Ravine Vineyard

Instructor—Ron Morris, PhD

# BERRYLAND

*“One berry, two berry, pick me a blueberry. Hatberry, shoeberry, in my canoeberry. Under the bridge, and over the dam, looking for berries, berries for jam.”*

Would you like a Berryland? Who doesn't love berries and the book *JamBerry* by Bruce Degen? His book makes you think of all the berries you could have— not just blueberries, strawberries, blackberries and raspberries.

You imagine so many berries you ask yourself, “What other berries could I grow?” How about gooseberries, elderberries, thimble berries, salmon berries, black cap raspberries, woodland strawberries, coffee berries, and huckleberries. Then there are manzanita, madrone, toyon, currants, Oregon grape, wild grape, choke cherry, and California wild rose.

Do you notice a pattern here? Do you remember seeing most of these plants in your native plant books? When looking for more drought tolerant, less demanding landscape choice you can have your native and eat it too. You can also provide native food for the wildlife, erosion protection, and fall color. Let's take a closer look at some of these plants, their requirements and uses.

Some of these plants can be found at nurseries (especially those focusing on natives), plant sales from native plant societies, other gardening groups, and friends. Fall is the best time to plant shrubs to let them acclimate to their environment and start growing new

roots before the stresses of hot summers. When propagating your own plants, it is best to start with a cutting or seed from a friend or a purchased plant. Be aware of any laws on collecting the fruits or parts of the native plants in the wild. Many native berries start well from seed.

Lots of **currants** and **gooseberries** from the *Ribes* family are grown for fruit and ornamental purposes. Both are multi stemmed shrubs from 3 to 5ft. And they do their best in zones 1-6 and 15-17. They can be grown in both Placer and Nevada counties, but need more shade in the hotter areas and do like more of a winter chill. Both like regular water with well draining soil and mulch—very wet conditions rot their roots.

Currants like pruning on 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> year branches. The most popular currants are black currants from *Ribes nigrum* or *R. odoratum*, red and white currants from *R. sativum*. The 'Wilder', 'Red Lake', and 'White Imperial' varieties are usually easier to find at nurseries and produce better fruit. More of the popular gooseberries are from European *Ribes uva-crispa*. 'Greenfinch' and 'Invecta' received awards of garden merit from the Royal Horticulture Society.

**Elderberries** and flowers most commonly are from *Sambucus caerulea* and *S. Mexicana* the two blue elders. They can be 10 ft. x 8ft. shrubs or up to 30 ft. by 20ft. Trees. They are grown at different altitudes, full sun to light shade, and prefer regular watering but established plants are drought

tolerant. Mature plants make a good windbreak or screen in the landscape. They are host to the little known and threatened valley elderberry longhorn beetle. Elderberries bloom spring to summer and can have ripe berries and flowers at the same time used for syrups, wine, jelly, pie, pancakes, sauces, etc.

**Manzanita** flowers, berries, are from many different shrubs to small trees in the *Arctostaphylos* clan, found and grown in all California zones. The most common here is the *A. manzanita*. They prefer well drained, rocky to sandy soil with light shade to full sun, and light to moderate water. Flowers and berries are used for sugars, syrups, cordials, baked goods, jellies, tea, and more.

Their cousin madrone (*Arbutus menziesii*) is native to the coastal west, but can be planted in the Sierra Nevada area preferring well draining soil, full sun to light shade and moderate to regular non-alkaline water. The flowers are similar to the Manzanita and their fruit are brilliant orange to red rough coated and somewhat bland balls, both were commonly used for foods.

The very popular Strawberry tree (*Arbutus unedo*) from Europe have similar flowers and fruit. Being in the Ericaceae family, all have flowers shaped like heaths and heathers. Both manzanita and madrone have a beautiful dark red peeling bark that can be used for teas.

*(Continued on page 6)*

Continued from page 5

*Heteromeles arbutifolia* known as **Toyon or California Holly** would be a great choice for the state berry. It is thought that Hollywood was named for the vast quantities of them growing in that area. They were used as a substitute for the popular holly boughs at Christmas. Usually found in scrub oak chaparral zones 5-9 and 14-24, they like full sun to partial shade, and moderate water. Fast growing, coupled with wide spreading root systems make them a great choice for erosion control on hillsides. Their spicy berries have been used by the native west coast Indians and Spanish settlers for both food and medicine. Cook the toyon berries to break down the small amount of cyanogenic glycosides, and drying helps sweeten them.

*Rhamnus californica*, the **California coffeeberry**, prefer zones 4-9 and 14-24, do well in full sun to partial shade, aren't fussy about soil, and needs little water once established. There are upright and groundcover varieties. This long lived shrub is great for suppressing soil erosion on hillsides. The fruit are berries that turn from green to red to black and, although edible, are generally not recommended for consumption due to possible laxative effects. Amazingly, *Rhamnus* has many varieties that are adapted to different altitudes, soils and water levels so you can find the perfect plant for any spot.

**Wild strawberries** are also called wood, woodland, and Alpine strawberries. *Fragaria vesca* Var. 'woodland', *F. vesca* Var. 'Californica', *F. vesca* Var. 'Virginica' are what we usually find growing natively, the alpine is native to Europe. The ornamental

strawberry with yellow flowers and bland fruit is sometimes called the wood strawberry and should not be confused with the others that sport very tasty fragrant fruit. Grown in a variety of habitats, these berries are not going to replace more domestic cultivars, but are a great accent to them and well worth having for their delightful flavor and spreading ground cover attributes.

**Black cap raspberries**, *Rubus occidentalis*, thimble berries, *R. ursinus*, and salmonberries, *R. spectabilis* don't produce as much as a garden cultivar but add a fun surprise in the garden when they are ripe. They could add a special touch to a bowl of ice cream or simple syrup.

**Oregon grapes**, *Mahonia aquifolium*, and California wild grapes, *Vitis californica*, are not related but can be used for similar results in the kitchen. Both have varieties that can give you a beautiful display of orange to red foliage, and are easy to grow.

They do fine on little water but could use a bit of shade in the hottest exposures. Oregon grape can be used as a garden border or low screen. The deciduous California grape can cover an arbor for summer shade, then give you great vines for winter wreaths.

Many of the berries can be dried then ground and used in cooking, added to sugar, or are a great addition to tea in a tea ball. Try making a simple syrup - put berries in a pan, cover with water, boil until fruit is tender 5-20 min. Strain out seeds and skins then add equal amount of sugar to juice and a little lemon juice bringing back to a boil for at least 5 minutes, cool and serve.

Elderberries, strawberries, black cap raspberries, thimble berries, and currants can be frozen and added to baked goods at a later date.

Try using wild and Oregon grapes for a jelly. Find books with recipes and ideas for wild foods that can be used for the berries you planted. Look online for recipes or local foraging groups that can share techniques. On a last note, if you are eating any part of these plants please make sure you can properly ID them, and know what parts you can eat to be safe.

## References

*Sunset Western Garden Book*. 2001. Kathleen N. Brenzel. Sunset Publishing Corporation.

*Species: Heteromeles arbutifolia*, *Species: Rhamnus californica*, *Species: Arctostaphyus manzanita*. USDA Forest Service website <http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/plants>

*Living Wild: Gardening Cooking and Healing with Native Plants of the Sierra Nevada*. 2011. Alicia Funk & Karin Kaufman. Flicker Press.

## Did You Know????

The Redbud Chapter of the California Native Plant Society covers Placer and Nevada Counties providing many opportunities to learn about CA native plants.

Visit their website: <http://www.redbud-cnps.org/>

**Stephanie Wagner**  
*Nevada County  
 Master Gardener*

# ROCK GARDENING: ARTFULLY BALANCING PLANTS AND ROCKS

When someone says ‘Rock Garden’, do you envision succulents and sages? Well, you might be surprised to know that, traditionally, rock gardens were considered to be a mini version of a high alpine environment, where small plants have adapted to extreme conditions and short growing seasons.

Fortunately, rock gardening today is accepted as a design choice that considers natural rock or stone just as important an element in the garden as the plants.

## Why choose a rock garden?

Because a rock garden is all about habitat – creating a diverse ecological niche by combining rock, custom-blended soil and plants that flourish in a unique setting. In a garden, rocks play an important role in the growth and health of many plants just as they do in their natural habitat.



Rock gardens can solve difficult landscape problems, like steep slopes, erosion and poor soils. And many of the compact plants that flourish in rock gardens are ideal for a small space.

## Designing a Rock Garden

The effect and beauty of a rock garden requires the right balance of plants and rock. Before starting your garden layout, evaluate your space.

Sites with a natural slope or rock outcropping are ideal for creating a rock garden. Large spaces lend themselves to a sprawling, natural design, while smaller spaces may be limited to a carefully defined mound.

## Choosing and Placing Rock

Any type of rock can be used in a rock garden, but using just one geological type will create a more natural look, especially if the rock is native to your area.

- Look for color and unusual variations of rock that will influence or complement your plant choices.
- Rocks should be installed in your garden before the plants. Use varying sizes and place them to create planting pockets of soil between rocks.
- Position rocks to mimic the way they would naturally emerge from the ground. At least one-third of the rock should be buried. Arrange rocks so the grain, striations or fracture lines are all pointed in the same direction.

## Plants

The type, variety and number of plants to be grown in a rock garden are largely determined by the amount of sun, and a dry soil composition.



When researching plant choices, consider the following:

- Rock garden plants can be grown in most climate zones, most requiring full sun. In warm climates, gardens that receive at least some afternoon shade tend to flourish.
- Like native plants, rock garden plants need good drainage and are typically drought-resistant.
- Some true rock garden plants need to be grown in close proximity to rocks in order to thrive; others are simply attractive when grown with rock accents.
- The word “saxatile” on a plant tag identifies a plant that grows well in close proximity with rocks.
- Rock garden plants do best in a 3-part mixture of topsoil, soft humus and sand.
- Plant a variety of species, repeating some species to make the garden look natural. Ideally, rock garden plants should spread slowly.
- Many rock garden plants are naturally small, low-growing and have a clumping habit.
- For steep grades, use species that produce dense, fibrous roots to help prevent soil erosion.

*(Continued on page 8)*

Continued from page 7

### Maintenance

Rock gardens require much the same maintenance as any garden. Weed control is typically the most time-consuming task since rock gardens must usually be tended by hand.

Maintenance is minimized by using an appropriate soil mix, by carefully choosing, and properly placing plants, by ensuring good drainage, and by making good plant choices.

To reduce mildew and fungus plant high, setting plants so the top half-inch of roots and container soil are exposed above the soil surface, and use dry mulch, preferably rock or gravel in a color similar to the rocks used in the garden.

Utilize the same smart cultural practices you would use for any garden, incorporating the few practices specific to rock garden plants. Unleash your creativity - try something new!

### References:

**Colorado State University** <http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/garden/07401.html>

**Penn State Extension**  
<http://extension.psu.edu/montgomery/programs/master-gardener/the-learning-gardens/the-rock-garden>

**Sierra Rock Garden Society** <http://www.sierrarockgarden.org/>

### Helpful plant lists:

<http://www.spokane-county.wsu.edu/spokane/eastside/Fact%20Sheets/C121%20Rock%20Garden%20Plants%20for%20the%20INW%202005.pdf>

<https://www.nargs.org/reference/good-rock-garden-plants>

<http://www.redbud-cnps.org/LandscapeLists2.htm>

**The Seasoned Gardener**  
by Carolyn Singer 2012.



## Got Leaves??? Time to Compost!!!

With the changing season comes cooler weather, shorter days and *lots of leaves*. Take advantage of all this organic material to start a compost pile. In this way, you can literally turn “waste” into a garden “resource”. The key to gardening in the foothills is amending our soils with COMPOST. The best compost in the world can be made in your own backyard using organic materials that you may normally consider “waste” and discard by burning or sending to the landfill.

### Come to a workshop and learn all about composting:

Composting Basics—October 5, 2013—9am to 10am—Auburn, CA—Placer Master Gardener Demonstration Garden @ 11477 E Ave. in DeWitt Center

Composting Basics—October 12, 2013—8:30am to 10:30am—Roseville, CA  
Roseville Utility Exploration Center in Mahany Park

OR call the **ROTLINE**—a hotline dedicated to composting questions!!!  
**530-889-7399**



# FALL 2013 WORKSHOP CALENDAR



## OCTOBER

Two Saturdays, October 5th and October 19th from 8am to Noon at Auburn Farmer's Market:  
***Placer County Master Gardener Information Table at Grower's Market***

Saturday, October 5th from 9am-11am at Placer Master Gardener Garden (11477 E Ave. Auburn):  
***Composting Basics (9am to 10am) and Vermiculture (10am to 11am)***

Two Saturdays, October 8th and October 22nd from 8:30am to 1pm at Roseville Farmer's Market:  
***Placer County Master Gardener Information Table at Whole Foods Market at Fountains***

Saturday, October 12th from 9am-Noon at NC Master Gardener Garden (1036 W. Main, GV):  
***Nevada County Master Gardeners FALL PLANT SALE!!!!***

Saturday, October 12th from 8:30am-10:30am at Roseville Utility Exploration Center:  
***Composting Basics***

## NOVEMBER

Saturday, November 2nd from 10am-Noon at NC Master Gardener Garden (1036 W. Main, GV):  
***Propagation from Hardwood Cuttings: Getting New Plants from Older Ones***

Saturday, November 9th from 10am-Noon at NC Master Gardener Garden (1036 W. Main, GV):  
***Pruning Backyard Fruit Trees***

Saturday, November 9 from 8:30am-10:30am at Roseville Utility Exploration Center:  
***Composting Basics***

***November 22-24—Mandarin Festival in Auburn—Come Visit the Placer County Master Gardeners!***



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**ELAINE APPLEBAUM**—PLACER MG      **LIZ REES**—NEVADA CO. MG

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