

June 20, 2018



## **Creating a Habitat Garden to Sustain Future Generations**

**By Catherine Moné**

**UCCE Master Gardener of El Dorado County**

Growing up in California's chaparral and grasslands, I was taught that our state's moniker, "The Golden State," didn't refer to the metal gold, but to the golden browns and sage greens that characterize our native landscape. The low hills around my family's home were teeming with birds, butterflies, reptiles, bobcats, and other wildlife. A child playing in that terrain couldn't help but learn about the natural world. Now, years later, the landscape is still golden and beautiful, but scientists tell us that the number of wild creatures and diversity of species is rapidly dwindling, and that these diminishment will have impact on future generations.

Consider this: To prosper for more than a single generation, all living creatures need at least seven things in their environment. The first three are obvious: food, water, and shelter. But wildlife also needs resting/roosting places, access to genetically diverse breeding partners, safe places to breed and raise young, and food sources suitable for their offspring.

As our human population has grown, these basic needs have become more difficult for animals to meet. We've dammed streams, built cities and subdivisions, removed native trees and shrubs and introduced invasive plants. But especially, we have hampered the free movement of creatures through areas where they can find food and water, which is the primary way they gain access to genetically diverse breeding partners. This has led to isolated islands of life, where the population's health and strength decline over time.

Wild critters need our help. The good news is, it's easy, fun, and rewarding to join the ranks of Californians who are working to expand wildlife habitat through essential conservation support. By engaging in sustainable gardening practices and making thoughtful plant choices, your backyard - be it 40 acres of land or a small container garden on a patio - can contribute to creating cohesive wildlife corridors across our state.

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Forest Service, the National Wildlife Federation, and many other groups offer a wealth of information on their websites to help you understand the importance of wildlife corridors, species diversity, and how you can help. But

June 20, 2018

even more simply, the next time you're outside, look around. Do your surroundings offer California native plants like toyon and manzanita, which have flowers, berries, and seeds that attract birds and native bees? Do you have oaks, willows, or native cherry plants that provide nesting places and attract the caterpillars birds need to feed their young? Do you offer clean water sources? Are there areas where animals can rest and hide, or breed and raise young? You might find that if you protect some of the plants that currently thrive on your property, you may already be offering excellent habitat.

But gardeners love to garden - to enhance, add beauty, and diversify. Toward those goals, the Master Gardeners offer free classes on Native Plants, Sustainable Gardening, Habitat Gardening, Beneficial Insect and Pollinator Gardens, and more. Our classes show you how to create beautiful gardens that attract lots of life but use little water, require no pesticides, and are remarkably easy to maintain. Take advantage of these opportunities to relax, learn, and meet like-minded gardeners in our community. Together, one backyard at a time, we can build the habitat corridors animals need to survive and be enjoyed by future generations.

On Saturday, June 23, Master Gardener Gail Fulbeck will discuss some common backyard birds and share strategies for attracting them to gardens in "Bringing Birds to Your Garden." This free class will be 9:00 a.m. to noon at Government Center, Bldg C – Hearing Room, 2850 Fairlane Ct, Placerville.

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](http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news). You can also find us on Facebook.