

Selecting & Planting California Native Plants

September 16, 2021

Carol Peck, UCCE Master Gardener

When to Plant CA Natives

- Potted Plants
Before first rain to allow for good root growth
- Seeds
 - After first rain to get best root growth and possible flowers in spring (annuals)
 - Label plantings
 - Propagation Techniques <https://npn.rngr.net/propagation/techniques>
and <https://calscape.org/>

Planting Order

1. Trees
allow enough space for the mature size
2. Shrubs
between trees or along borders
keep pathways open for trimming, weeding and enjoying the yard
3. Herbaceous (plants without woody stems)
keep away from roots of trees and shrubs

What CA Native to Plant

- Go to Calscape and enter your zip code: <https://calscape.org/>
by UC Berkeley and the California Native Plant Society
- Lists 86 plants native to Palo Alto that are available in nurseries
- Sun, water, soil, temperature and other requirements are listed for each plant with lots of pictures

How to Plant

- Potted Plants
 - Dig hole as deep as root ball and twice as wide
 - Remove plant from pot
 - Remove some soil from root ball into hole
 - Mix soil in hole
 - Untangle roots
 - Put plant in hole with soil higher than native soil
 - Back fill hole with native soil
 - Water until moist to depth of roots. Do NOT overwater

Watering

- New plants - Regular to establish healthy roots, no run-off or puddles
- Schedule
 - 1st year: once per week, except when raining
 - 2nd year: once every 2 weeks for low water plants
 - 3rd year: once every 3 weeks for drought tolerant plants
 - 4th year and thereafter: once every 4 weeks for very low water plants
 - No additional water for Flannel bush (*Fremontodendron californicum*), oaks (*Quercus*), et al
 - Dry Winters: Semi-monthly watering needed when nature doesn't provide rain (November through April). Drought-tolerant plants get their water from the rains.
- Water depends on root depth
 - Start checking soil 2 weeks after rain stops
Top 2-6 inches dry – needs water even in winter
 - Water the ground not the leaves
 - Water around the plants (drip line) not the trunk or stem

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- Water slowly over time to penetrate clay
- Water to 6 inches deep for herbaceous plants
- Water to 12 inches deep for trees and shrubs

Mulch

- Lay biodegradable materials, such as newspapers or cardboard around new plants to prevent weeds
- Type of mulch type on type of plant:
 - Small wood chips, bark or arbor mulch around woodland or coastal scrub plants
 - Gravel or gold fines around succulents, chaparral and desert plants
 - Leaf litter protects soil and decomposes. Don't throw it away
 - No plastic landscape fabric (promotes unhealthy, anaerobic soil and critter can't get through)
- When and Where to Mulch
 - Spring is a good time to replenish the mulch in the garden
 - Summer and Fall add as needed to keep a 4-6 inch layer for trees and shrubs
 - Potted natives need mulch too
 - Keep mulch away from main stem or trunk (around drip line)
- Benefits of Biodegradable Mulch
Helps keep moisture in soil, reduces weeds, moderates soil temperature, decomposed mulch feeds the plants, improves garden's appearance and the organic matter improves the drainage, and in general it feeds the soil food web

Weeds

- Pull out as much root as possible or remove top multiple times
- Lay newspaper or cardboard around plants to prevent weeds
- No herbicides (initially developed to kill native plants)
- Most weeding is easier during and right after rainy season
- Young weeds without flowers and seeds can be composted

Fertilizer

- No fertilizer needed for natives in the ground – Don't kill them with kindness
- Compost promotes healthy soil and plants
- All potted natives need a little fertilizer to replace nutrients washed away
Use compost or ¼ strength organic slow release or diluted liquid kelp

Pruning

Winter	Spring	Summer	Fall
Coppice	Deadhead	Deadhead	Deadhead
Prune deciduous trees & shrubs	Prune evergreen trees & shrubs after rain stops	Prune summer dormant plants	

- Deadhead – remove faded flowers, except for fruit or seeds
- Coppice – cut main stem down to 3-6 inches above ground
- Pruning
 - Using sharp, disinfected pruners to avoid spreading fire blight
 - Amount of pruning depends on plant, Ceanothus dies with heavy pruning
 - Remove touching branches
 - Clear inside air circulation (prevent rot) but keep leaf cover

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- Shearing shrubs damages the plant
- Ground cover - trim to fit your yard size

Yard Clean up

- Sweep/or blow small leaves and garden debris into the garden beds for mulch and eventually compost
- Weeds with flowers and seeds are best in the city yard waste bins
- Do not use a blower to move debris into the garden beds as it compacts the soil and removes the mulch

References:

- Calscape: <https://calscape.org/>
- CNPS Santa Clara Valley Chapter: <http://www.cnps-scv.org/>
- Gardening With Natives Forum: <https://groups.io/g/GardeningWithNatives>
 - Experienced gardeners and professionals can help with problems and questions
- Propagation Techniques <https://npr.rngr.net/propagation/techniques>
- Master Gardeners, Santa Clara County <http://mgsantaclara.ucanr.edu>
- Master Gardener Help <http://mgsantaclara.ucanr.edu/garden-help>
- Integrated Pest Management <http://ipm.ucdavis.edu>
- California Native Plants for the Garden by C. Bornstein, D. Fross, and B. O'Brien
- California Native Gardening: A Month by Month Guide by H. Popper

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TREES	height width	Soil	Sun	Water max in summer	Notes
Aesculus californica California Buckeye	13-40 ft 40 ft	Adapts	Full-part	2x/month	Flowers in spring; Fruit in summer; Winter deciduous; Cold to -5F; Found in central CA
Prunus ilicifolia Holly Leaf Cherry	30-49 ft 20 ft	Draining	Full-part	1x/month	White flowers in winter or spring; Evergreen; Cold to 15F; Found in coastal CA to Baja
Quercus agrifolia Coast Live Oak	25-82 ft 15-35 ft	Draining	Full-part	1x/month	Evergreen; Cold to 15F; Stabilizes banks; Deer resistant
Umbellularia californica California Laurel	6-80 ft 3-30 ft	Slow draining	Full-part	3x/month	White or yellow flowers in spring; Evergreen; Very easy to grow; Cold to 10F

SHRUBS	height width	Soil	Sun	Water max in summer	Notes
Baccharis pilularis Coyote Bush	1.5-10 ft 12 ft	Adapts	Full-part	1x/week	Yellow to white flower in spring to fall; Evergreen; Very easy to grow
Frangula californica Coffeeberry	6-15 ft 5-15 ft	Draining	part shade	2x/month	Evergreen; white-green flowers in spring- summer; Cold to 10 degrees F; Not for coffee
Heteromeles arbutifolia Toyon	6-30 ft 10-15 ft	Adapts	full-part	2x/month	White flowers in summer; Redberries in winter for birds; Evergreen; Cold to -5F; Found in coastal mountains
Lupinus albifrons Silver Lupine	3-5 ft 2-3 ft	fast draining	Full	2x/month	Purple-lavender, fragrant flowers late winter to early summer; Evergreen; Cold to -10F; Found throughout CA
Ribes sanguineum var. glutinosum Blood Currant	13 ft 7 ft	Adapts	Full-part	3x/month	Pink/Purple in winter-spring; Winter deciduous; Cold to 15F

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SHRUBS	height width	Soil	Sun	Water max in summer	Notes
Rosa californica California wildrose	8-10 ft 10 ft	moist loam	Full sun - full shade	3x/month	Red, pink or white flowers in spring- summer; Easy to grow; Winter deciduous; Cold to -10F; Found throughout CA
Rubus ursinus Pacific Blackberry	2-6 ft 6 ft	Adapts, draining	Fullsun to Full shade	1x/month with shade	White fragrant flowers in spring; Prickly; Only female plants produce fruit; Likes cool weather, good to 0F; Found along coast

SHORT PLANTS	height width	Soil	Sun	Water max in summer	Notes
Grindelia stricta Oregon Gumweed	3.3-5 ft 7 ft	fast draining	Full	3x/month	Yellow or red flowers in spring to fall; Summer semi-deciduous; Good to 30F; Easy to grow
Juncus patens Common Rush	1-3 ft 3 ft	Adapts	Full	1x/month	Clumping, fountain of green; Evergreen; Easy to grow; Cold to 15F; Found along coast
Triteleia laxa Ithuriel's Spear	2 ft 5 ft	tolerates clay	Full-part shade	2x/month	Blue, purple or white flowers I spring to summer; Summer deciduous; Found Bakersfield to Redding
Verbena lasiostychys Vervain	2.6 ft 3 ft	Adapts	Full sun	1x/week	Lavender flowers in spring to fall; Summer deciduous; Cold to -20F; Found in coastal ranges