

Gardening is for the Birds

Gardening with native plants can help you create a backyard environment that enhances your quality of life, and that of the wildland residents as well.



Choose native plants for the bulk of your landscaping if you want attractive, low-maintenance, drought-tolerant, fire-retardant plants that also provide habitat for wild birds.

Aesthetic Value — The distinctiveness and value of your property depends, in part, on your landscaping decisions. Many native plants are unusually attractive, but as yet relatively unknown to most gardeners. Visit a nursery or arboretum specializing in Southern California plants, or a plant sale by the California Native Plant Society to learn about the variety and beauty of these plants.

Drought Tolerance — Native plants, adapted to our semi-arid climate, are naturally drought tolerant. To survive the warm, dry summer, some species lose their leaves and become dormant. However, the plants recommended for wildlands edge landscaping will stay green all year with a minimum of water. Their ability to withstand drought and keep high moisture levels in leaves and branches is what also makes them fire retardant.

Fire Safety — Periodic fire is not only inevitable, but necessary to maintain the health and viability of the natural scrub communities. Recognizing this fact, homeowners need to take precautions when designing, planting and maintaining landscaping. Many native plant species do not burn easily, and are considered to be fire retardant.

Habitat Value — Before your home was built, the wildlands that adjoin your property extended well beyond your fence line. Habitat loss is the single biggest threat to the survival of native plants and animals in Southern California, so it is important to consider the quality of the habitat you are creating. Appropriate landscape plantings at the urban/wildlands edge can extend the natural habitats and provide a gradual transition from the open space.

For more information, start with the resources at the end of this brochure.



Native plants familiar to local birds, such as these yellow-rumped warblers, will draw them into your garden.



Laurel sumac and other native shrubs are easily grown without toxic chemicals.

Gardening For Wildlife

Turn your garden into habitat by **gardening for wildlife**. Smaller wildlife, such as lizards, birds, and butterflies, can be encouraged to make their home in your garden if you provide water and natural food (native plants) and alter your gardening techniques to accommodate them.

BIRDS

- Provide a reliable source of water.** In semi-arid southern California, this is the single most important attractor for native birds. Hanging or pedestal style birdbaths are widely available, even styles for decks. Situate a standing birdbath away from shrubs and clumps of dense vegetation that could hide a crouching cat, a major danger for birds. If cats are not a problem, a small fountain or pond is an attractive way to provide water for birds, but expect other wildlife visitors.
- Plant native trees and large bushes,** such as toyon, live oak, elderberry, and lemonade berry, to provide food and shelter all year to wild birds. Familiar native plants will help draw local birds into your garden. A diversity of plants will provide different types of food at different seasons.
- Reduce the lawn and increase the amount of foliage** (trees and shrubs) in the garden. The more cover and food your garden provides, the more birds you will have.
- Increase spatial and species diversity** by: 1) planting a variety of different plants; 2) choosing plants of varying heights; 3) creating casual groupings of plants interspersed with open areas for foraging.
- Leave some leaf litter on the ground for food and shelter.** Wilderness isn't very neat, but it provides lots of resources for birds and lizards, such as seeds and insects which accumulate under leaf litter. Leaf litter or other mulch also protects the surface of the soil from the sun, softening it, retaining moisture, and allowing beneficial earthworms to flourish.
- Practice organic gardening** and limit or eliminate the use of toxic chemicals in your garden. Birds need insect food,

mainly species which are not garden pests but which are susceptible to pesticides. Abundant birds will help keep insects and spiders under control throughout the garden, and around the eaves of the house. It is gratifying to watch birds like warblers or flycatchers feasting on a swarm of flying termites!

- Consider providing bird feeders** for seed-eating birds until food plants grow. Native seed eaters such as goldfinches, towhees, white-crowned sparrows, grosbeaks, mourning doves, scrub jays and possibly quail, will appear at feeders in gardens located near patches of native vegetation. Insect- or fruit-eating birds will be more common in gardens with native shrubs which provide those kinds of food.

BUTTERFLIES

Butterflies are colorful, erratic visitors to most gardens, attracted by a wide variety of flowers, both native and cultivated. A growing number of people around the country plant butterfly gardens, mixtures of colorful and nectar-rich flowering plants designed to attract butterflies. Some stores sell butterfly feeders which you fill with a sugar water solution.

The butterfly is the last of four distinct stages: egg, caterpillar or feeding stage, pupa or resting stage, and adult butterfly. Besides feeding the adults, if you really want to help butterflies, plant the food plants for the caterpillar. Unlike the adults, the caterpillars can feed only on one or a very few types of plants. The Monarch caterpillar eats only plants in the milkweed family. Fortunately, some varieties, such as Indian Milkweed, are handsome plants with attractive clusters of flowers.

Many caterpillar plants, like wild anise, wild mustard, and cheeseweed, are usually considered weeds, so a butterfly garden may work best in a corner which doesn't have to look neat all the time. Most importantly, help butterflies complete their life cycle by looking out for the resting stage, the pupa, before clearing weeds, leaf litter, or other debris.

- If you want to start a butterfly garden** but don't know the local butterflies, begin



The best way to ensure the survival of butterflies like the Monarch is to protect all stages of their life cycle.

by planting *Buddleia davidii* ("butterfly bush"), *Verbena bonariensis* or common lantana, plants known to attract butterflies. Try to identify any butterfly in your garden with a field guide. Plant the larval food plants, as per the field guide and probably local natives, nearby.

Listed below are a few locally common butterflies and their larval food plants:

- American Painted Lady.....*Cheeseweed*
- Anise Swallowtail.....*Wild Anise*
- Tiger Swallowtail.....*California Sycamore*
- Common & Cabbage Whites.....*Wild Mustard*
- Mourning Cloak.....*Willow*
- Monarch.....*Common Milkweed*

Fire Safety

The natural communities that adjoin many of Southern California's residential neighborhoods will burn periodically as part of a natural cycle of growth and senescence. Proper landscaping can help your home survive a wildlands fire.

In newer developments, a buffer zone known as a **Fuel Modification Zone** is maintained between homes and the

adjacent open space. The FMZ is designed to slow an oncoming wildfire and reduce the size of the flames. Plants in the FMZ should be fire retardant.

Consideration should be given to fire safety throughout the wilderness edge garden. A short list of fire-retardant native plants is included below: check the suggested sources for more choices. The arrangement, spacing, and maintenance of these plants should also be considered.

To design and maintain safe landscapes, two factors must be controlled: the **fuel load** must be low and **fuel continuity** must be broken. Fuel load is the amount of burnable material in a given area such as dead undergrowth, debris and flammable vegetation. Dead branches and leaves of any plant are a fire hazard, easily ignited by burning embers. Regular maintenance to reduce the fuel load is a must.

Fuel continuity refers to fire's ability to follow a fuel source such as a juniper hedge or wood fence. Proper spacing breaks fuel continuity by creating a fuel mosaic, this helping to reduce flame lengths.

Fire-Resistant Natives*

Suitable for use in Fuel Modification Zones in Laguna Greenbelt Coastal Areas.



Plant bush monkeyflower and other fire-resistant native plants to attract birds and butterflies.

LARGE SHRUBS

- Lemonade Berry[†]
- Laurel Sumac[‡]
- Coffeeberry[§]
- Coyote Bush[†]
- Redberry[†]
- Hollyleaf Redberry[†]

BUNCHGRASSES

- Foothill Stipa
- Purple Stipa

EVERGREEN TREES

- Coast Live Oak[†]
- Toyon (Christmas Berry)[†]
- Elderberry[†]
- Scrub Oak

DECIDUOUS TREES

- California Sycamore^{†§}

WILDFLOWERS

- Woolly Blue Curls[†]
- Blue-eyed Grass

CACTUS & SUCCULENTS

- Coastal Prickly Pear
- Coast Cholla
- Lance-leaved Dudleya[†]
- Chalk Lettuce

SMALL-MEDIUM SHRUBS

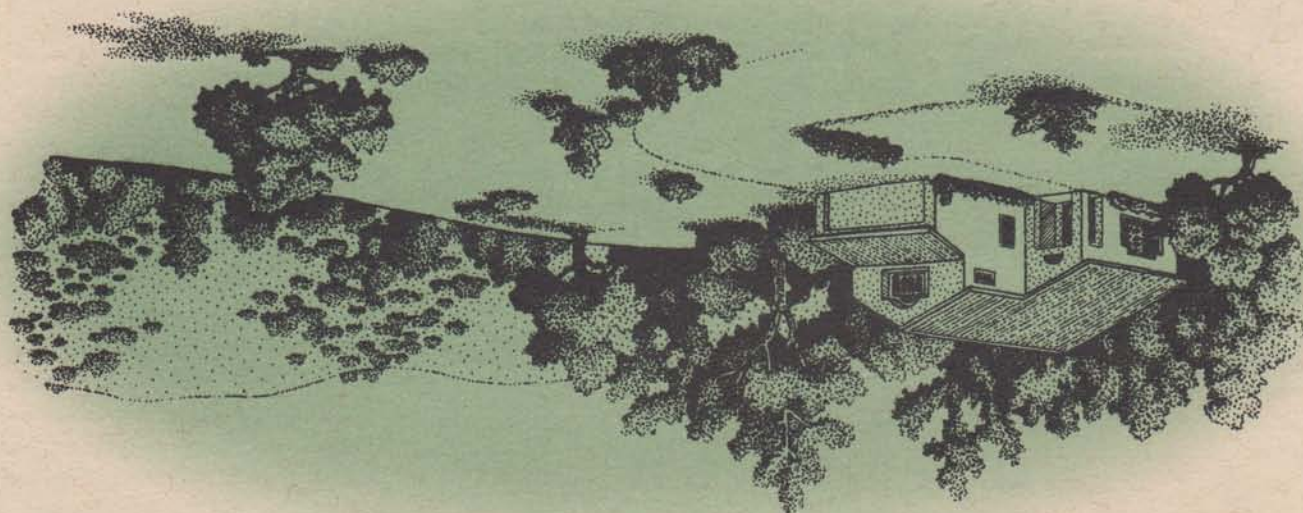
- Bush Monkeyflower[§]
- Bladderpod[†]
- California Fuchsia[†]
- Chaparral Honeysuckle[†]

Notes

* The term 'native' here means plants growing in the Laguna Greenbelt natural areas. Many other plants are native to California but are not found locally in the wild. All species are considered to be drought-resistant

† Recommended for bird gardening

§ Food plant for butterfly caterpillar



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For Assistance and More Information

- 🌿 LAGUNA GREENBELT VIDEOS AND PUBLICATIONS in the Local History section of the Laguna Beach Public Library.
- 🌿 LAGUNA BEACH LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES, available at City Hall.
- 🌿 TREE OF LIFE NATIVE PLANT NURSERY, San Juan Capistrano (714) 728-0685. Call for retail open hours. Native plants; also erosion control seed mixes, literature on bird gardening, fire retardant species, etc.
- 🌿 THEODORE PAINE NURSERY, Sunland (818) 768-1802. Native plants, retail.
- 🌿 ACORN NATURALISTS, Tustin (800) 422-8886. Call for catalog. Large selection of science and nature books, kits, videos, etc.
- 🌿 CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY, c/o CSU Fullerton Arboretum (714) 773-3579. Ask for Celia Kutcher. Plant sales, guidelines for native plant gardening, field guides.
- 🌿 XERCES SOCIETY, Portland, Oregon (503) 222-2788. Non-profit organization for the preservation of habitats for butterflies and other invertebrates.
- 🌿 PACIFIC WILDLIFE PROJECT, Mission Viejo (714) 831-1178. Care for sick or injured wildlife.
- 🌿 HUMMINGBIRD HAVEN, Anaheim (714) 635-3368. Care for hummingbirds and other wild birds.

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