Native Gardeners’ Corner—Members’ Tips, Tricks, and Techniques

This column is a regular newsletter feature offering chapter members and local experts a chance to briefly share information on many things related to gardening with natives. Answers are listed in order received.

The request for this edition of the newsletter is: “Which native do you really enjoy as a small tree and why?”

Christiane Shannon: “In my mature garden, there is only one native plant that answers to your question: *Chilopsis linearis* or Desert Willow. I planted the pink blossoms type in the fall 2002; it has grown to a beautiful mature specimen not quite 20 feet tall that needs only a light pruning once a year for style and space purposes. Being native of our Southern California deserts, it is at home in my rocky/sandy soil. When in bloom, it attracts different species of bees and the local hummingbirds. My only regret is not to have the space for another, the one with the burgundy flowers.”

Ron Vanderhoff: “I have two Western Redbuds. These are small-growing trees with truly year-round interest, including a beautiful branching habit that shows well in the winter months. A relatively new selection called ‘Claremont’ (from the RSA Botanic Garden) may even better be, with more flowers and even better color. It’s on my wish list.”

John Gossett: “As a couple, my wife and I like the *Ceanothus* ‘Sierra Blue’ trees in our no-water back yard because the rich, dark green leaves and beautiful flower spikes make a great background to the desert plants with sharp textures and brilliant flowers. For myself (and the birds), we love the tall, willowy *Sambucus mexicana* for its huge umbrels of tiny gold stars and the masses of purple elderberries they turn into. My wife is not fond of it because the elderberries cover the driveway, and the birds leave traces as well.”

Bart O’Brien: “There are so many!! But the one that I think gets overlooked way too often is *Chilopsis linearis* and its many cultivars. Loves heat, drought tolerant when established, easy to grow. Flowers in waves all summer long and well into fall, as long as it gets some summer deep irrigation (about 2-3 times a month should do). Nice dappled shade to garden under. Evergreen forms, seedless (or nearly so) forms, lots of different flower colors. So many excellent plusses. It can take some time to find the desirable clones, but they are well worth looking for!”

Rama Nayeri: “I love the Birdhill Manzanita, because it’s just gorgeous.”

Susan Krzywicki: “Tecate cypress (*Cupressus forbesii* - now reclassified by some as *Hesperocyparis forbesii*) is my favorite: beautiful scent, easy to grow and it makes a nice architectural statement. It is super-Southern California specific, and the Thorne’s Hairstreak butterfly loves to lay its eggs on this beauty. Tecate cypress usually tops out at 15 feet, but I have a couple in my garden that are taller than that. Last holiday season, I wreathed one of mine in gold garlands, added big outdoor gold ornaments, and put a strong solar spotlight on it. That was the extent of my decorating, but my neighbors got a kick out of it!”

Thea Gavin: “I love our *Chilopsis linearis*; it’s not too tall at maturity (maybe 15 feet?), deciduous, with an interesting branch structure (and seems to take pruning/shaping well) as well as large purplish blossoms that attract hummingbirds.”

Alan Lindsay: “I really enjoy the Santa Cruz Island Ironwood (*Lyonothamnus floribundus* subsp. *asplenifolius*) with its open structure and bark. (I have had some difficulty keeping them alive during hot spells.) They are relatively fast growing and when in bloom they are beautiful and I like the open structure and the bark. My second choice is the Toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*), the island version from Tree of Life Nursery. It’s also a fast grower and as everyone knows has abundant white flowers that produce a red fruit that birds love. Lastly, I love oaks so I have 5 species in my garden. All but one is considered a shrub, but several of those can reach 15 feet, a small tree. The only real tree is the Island Oak (*Quercus tomentella*) which I plan on pruning to a small tree.”

Mark Sugars: “*Rhus integrifolia*; it’s tough, evergreen, tolerant of pruning, and a good feeder of birds.”

Leon Baginski: “That’s an easy one. Any manzanita will do. Love the gorgeous red bark and the pale green leaves in contrast.”

Helen Smisko: “*Cercis occidentalis* (western redbud) is a deciduous, multi-trunk tree that grows in most soils, including clay. It can take some watering but is also drought tolerant. Requires winter frost for dark-pink flower display in spring. Heart-shaped leaves appear in summer that turn yellow/red in fall. Seed pods and geometric branching are winter interest. A dynamic plant.”

Dan Songster: “Just to be contrary I will praise two trees that may not always get a lot of thought. *Ceanothus* ‘Snow Flurry’ is a white flowering form of *C. thyrsiflora* that gets taller than ‘Ray Hartman’ around 12-20 feet, looks best as a low branching tree and has green bark. Another favorite has been mentioned but for those needing a very quick-growing large shrub or small tree, Mexican Elderberry (now named Blue Elderberry-*Sambucus nigra* ssp. *Caerulea*). Birds love it and while it can get crowded with crossing and suckering branches, with a little work it can be a very shapely tree. It is deciduous, which is a good time to clearly see what needs pruning and do the work.”

Our question for the next newsletter is: “Which summer blooming native plants are your favorites?”
CONSERVATION

BANNING RANCH 1: The proposed Banning Ranch development is expected to have its final hearing at this September’s Coastal Commission meeting, date TBA. The hearing will be a culmination of the Banning Ranch Conservancy’s (BRC) 17 years’ work to preserve Banning Ranch. BRC must raise $5,000 by the end of July in order to meet the upcoming challenge.

ACTION NOW: Help support BRC’s final! campaign: banningranchconservancy.org/make-a-donation.html

BANNING RANCH 2: CNPS is now officially an Amici in the Amicus Brief in support of BRC’s appeal to the State Supreme Court. The other Amici are the Center for Biological Diversity and the Coastal Environmental Rights Foundation. The appeal asks that the OC Appeals Court’s reversal of the OC Superior Court’s finding, that the proposed Banning Ranch development violates CEQA among other issues, be itself reversed.

CHINO/PUENTE HILLS: There is now an unprecedented opportunity to purchase one or all of the private properties that encompass the eastern ridge lines above Chino Hills State Park.

ACTION NOW: Contact Hills for Everyone, HillsForEveryone.org, to support their work to garner the needed political, agency, and media muscle to acquire these properties.

TALBERT REGIONAL PARK is a long narrow strip of remnant flood plain, along the east side of the Santa Ana River from Fairview Park to Banning Ranch. The Final Habitat Restoration Plan has recently been released: ocplanning.net/planning/projects/orange_is_the_new_green. The Plan identifies three alternatives for restoring native habitat and improving public access. The alternatives cover a range of improvements from simple to complex; the estimated costs for each also cover a range.

Once an alternative is selected, there are many more steps of environmental review and permit application before construction can begin.

ACTION NOW: Especially if you live in Costa Mesa, Huntington Beach, or environs, contact Sierra Club.BanningRanch@gmail.com and/or ocplanning.net to find out how to help the best alternative be chosen.

SAFE TRAILS: The Orange County Parks Commission has created a new OC Parks Trails Sub-Committee, to be an advisory body to the Commission, addressing matters regarding County trails and bikeways and providing a public forum for trails issues. Ron Vanderhoff, OCCNPS Board Member and Field Trip Chair, has offered to represent us on the Subcommittee. This is a great opportunity to bring a native plant perspective into OC trail issues—thank you Ron!

“ORANGE IS THE NEW GREEN”: OC’s zoning code is being updated, with the goal to increase sustainability in OC’s unincorporated areas. This includes: “1.4. Provide a plant palette of County approved planting materials. A consolidated drought tolerant plant palette should be created...”

This is a great opportunity for OCCNPS to advance the cause of native landscaping! However, the update process involves much more than providing a natives palette, see: ocplanning.net/planning/projects/orange_is_the_new_green. Brad Jenkins, OCCNPS Board member and Treasurer, has offered to represent us in the update process—thank you Brad!

—Celia Kutcher. Conservation Chair

It’s Official—Oscar Clarke’s Flora of the Santa Ana River and Environs will be reprinted.

Heyday Press has just informed us that this most valuable volume will be re-printed! Our chapter made a donation to Heyday (a not-for-profit publisher) towards this reprint and sent out a plea for others to help. Thanks to all of you who saw the importance of this book and made contributions.

As we mentioned in a recent newsletter article, Oscar Clarke was a self-taught botanist, author and founder of the Herbarium at UC Riverside who recently passed away at the age of 93. Known as a “walking encyclopedia of local natural history,” he started the UC Riverside herbarium in 1966 and was its curator until 1979, still visiting and volunteering at the herbarium as recently as last year. He was a friend and mentor to many botanists, naturalists, and ethnobotanists in our region. Along with Greg Ballmer, one of his co-authors, he spoke to our chapter back in 2008 when the book was being introduced—a very enjoyable evening indeed.

If you have a copy, you know what an informative and special book this is—a culmination of Clarke's lifetime natural history study, and in many ways a mirror of Oscar’s personality, brimming with ideas, images, and just crammed with interesting and useful details. If you don’t own a copy, you will soon again be able to purchase one.

Thanks again, to all our members and others who helped fund the reprint of this remarkable book!

There’s a New Garden in Town!

The new Pollinator Garden at the San Joaquin Wildlife Sanctuary in Irvine is fantastic. Visitors walking through the gate in the little fence surrounding the garden enter a world of native plants that really help our pollinators survive—whether they are hummingbirds, butterflies, beetles, or bees of various species. And in the evenings, moths or maybe even bats!

Over 6,000 square feet is big enough to be spread out, but a decomposed granite pathway winding through allows a close-up view of most of the plants. It is a young garden, only planted in January, and already it is beautiful. What a wonderland of fragrance, color, and insect and bird activity it will become as it matures!

Project Director of Education Trude Hurd and assistant Deborah Brin of the Sea and Sage Audubon chapter designed and planted the garden to show how local homeowners can help nearby wildlife. It is inspiring and definitely shows what native plants will thrive here, beautify our gardens, and at the same time provide food for our native pollinators.

Plan a visit—this garden has a lot! From fragrant Cleveland and hummingbird sages, summer-blooming California fuchsia, several succulent Dudleya, long-blooming island bush snapdragon, California and ashy-leaf buckwheat, tubular-flowered scarlet bugler, neon showy penstemon, various California wild lilac, our local monkeyflowers and more.

For more information and directions, go to seaandsageaudubon.org or call the Audubon House at 714-261-7963.
Chapter meetings are held on the third Thursday of the month except in July and August. Meetings usually take place at the Duck Club in Irvine. Doors open at 6:45 pm; the program begins at 7:30.

**Directions to the Duck Club:**
The Duck Club is located in the San Joaquin Wildlife Sanctuary next to the IRWD water treatment facility. From the Jamboree exit of the 405:
Head toward Newport Beach. Go south (left) on Michelson to Harvard Avenue. Turn right on Harvard. At University Drive, turn right and stay in the far right lane. At Campus, turn right and stay to the right. The entrance to wildlife sanctuary is the next right. Turn left into the parking lot. The Duck Club is in the center, restrooms on the left, Audubon House on the right.
From the Culver exit:
Heading toward UCI, pass Michelson and continue on to University Drive. Turn right onto University. Turn right onto Campus and stay to the far right for the turn into the wildlife sanctuary.

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**SPECIAL MEETING**

**Thursday, July 7—Invasive Plant Detection and Mapping Workshop**

7:30 PM, Duck Club, Irvine

At this interactive workshop, members of the OC CNPS Emergent Invasive Plant Committee will demonstrate how to plot invasive plants using the Calflora database. Calflora.org is a powerful tool used collaboratively by our chapter, land managers, public agencies, professional biologists and the public in plotting and tracking these plant invaders.

You will learn how to easily and quickly share a plant’s location information with others. We will teach you how to add a new entry, create a point location or a polygon, add details about abundance and habitat, and add photographs to your records. You will also learn how to search the records of other contributors, see where plants occur in Orange County and how to add comments to existing plant records. Calflora is a very useful online tool that is free to the public. Calflora information feeds into CalWeedMapper, the online weed management tool of The California Invasive Plant Council. In addition to its uses in invasive plant management, once you learn to use Calflora you will find it to be an essential resource for native plant identification and distribution that will help you better understand our local native plants.

The workshop is free and open to everyone. If you have a native plant and a specific location and date for the sighting, please bring it with you. We will use it during the workshop and post it to Calflora. You should either bring the GPS coordinates of the sighting or be prepared to pick out the location accurately on a satellite map. The plant can be either an invasive plant or a native plant.

**June 23 Star Thistle Pull a Success!**

Tireless thistle searchers, pullers and baggers Kyoko Kremp, Celia Kutcher, and Rachel Whitt led by Ron Vanderhoff searched diligently for every yellow star thistle but only found 123 plants. That’s good, since last year, in the same location in Santiago Canyon, 2,053 plants were removed! The huge drop in numbers can’t be completely explained, but our OC CNPS management of this population is certainly a contributing factor. Over 90% of the seed bank of yellow star thistle is exhausted after only three years, so our pulling and the drought are probably combining to knock this population down.

Also a highlight is our partnership with the Cleveland National Forest, which granted entry permits for this work.

Our Emergent Invasive Plant Program is making a difference.

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**GARDEN TOUR 2017**
Visiting private gardens throughout the county gives people who are thinking about incorporating natives in their landscapes the opportunity to see them incorporated into a variety of landscape designs in diverse microclimates and neighborhoods. The garden tour committee will be happy to check out your garden any time. Contact us at gardentour@occnps.org.

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*from *Forest Trees of the Pacific Slope*, George Sudworth, Dover 1967.
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☐ Student/Limited Income ................... $25

[Organizations, please go to CNPS.ORG]

☐ Affiliate with the Orange County Chapter.
The chapter newsletter, CNPS Bulletin, and Fremontia are included. Membership is tax deductible, minus $12 for Fremontia. Make check payable to CNPS and send to: CNPS, 2707 K Street, Suite 1, Sacramento, CA 95816

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Garden Tour: Mabel Alazard, Jennifer Beatty, Dori Ito, Sarah Jayne
Plant Science Team (Research OC):
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Rare Plants: Dave Bramlet, Fred Roberts
Interest Center: Bob Allen

Conservation Team (Protect OC):
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Invasive Plants: Henry DiRocco

Explore Team (Explore OC):
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