



## Calendar

- Sep 16 .....Chapter Meeting
- Oct 7 .....Board Meeting
- Oct 9 ..... SmartScape Expo
- Oct 16 ..... SCB Symposium
- Oct 21 .....Chapter Meeting
- Oct 23 ..... Plant Sale at TOLN
- Oct 26 – 29 ..... Cal-IPC Symposium
- Nov 4 .....Board Meeting
- Nov 18.....Chapter Meeting

### Native Gardener’s Corner—Member’s 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.

The request for this edition is: **“Do you use mulch in your native garden? If so, what type do you prefer, which do you avoid, and why?”**

**Jake Hoffman:** “Early on I used red wood chips (about 3/8”) when I put in my garden. Right now I mulch in place when I tidy up a bit. I mow the median with a mulching mower once the seed sets for the poppies and lupines and let it lie. In other areas I just let leaf litter

fall or if I need mulch I clip into small pieces and let it drop or run over the clipping with the lawnmower on the driveway and then distribute the clippings to areas that need mulch.”

**Brad Jenkins:** “For new yards with young spaced plants, mulch (often organic) helps with aesthetics, weed management, and soil improvement. When mature plants cover the ground, clipping and pruning these plants provides yard mulch as needed. In established plant areas, consider only a light mulch layer because thick organic mulch holds water like a sponge instead of it going into the ground for roots (thank you Orchid Black for that demonstration.) For the first two feet around a house, I use large gravel or small cobble river rock. For insect lovers, consider areas of no mulch – dry dirt for ground nesting bees and damp dirt for butterflies.”

**Elizabeth Wallace:** “I use whatever mulch is free when I first plant my garden, and then I rely on leaf litter as the garden matures. I think of oak leaves as little gold coins— they are such lovely mulch.”

**Chuck Wright:** “At one point I used Dr. Earth compost. Now I just let the leaves lie. The bugs and spiders are happy and so are the foraging critters.”

**Greg Rubin:** “So mulch is much more than a top dressing that helps with moisture and weeds. It's actually an integral part of the ecology—the plant community begets the mulch, and the mulch begets the plant community. I use shredded redwood bark (Gorilla hair) to best emulate the compacted duff layer that forms in dense shrubland and woodland ecosystems. I use inorganic sand/rocks/gravel (or nothing) with communities that have less biomass: desert, grassland, coastal strand, etc. I avoid free recycled yard waste like the plague, especially as it can contain high levels of trash, nitrates, weeds, pathogens, plastics, chemicals, etc. BTW, despite conventional wisdom, we have had excellent results with gorilla hair in fires, the key being it must be in a consolidated (poorly oxygenated) condition, which occurs rather rapidly with light overhead irrigation.”

**Alan Lindsay:** “I try and use non-organic "mulch" when possible. I've experimented with several types of rock including pumice-like lava rock. If applied properly rock will serve as a weed barrier but it hasn't worked in all cases. In my opinion the primary benefit is that it adds minerals to the soil and

conserves water, and it can be decorative: I've used different shades in different planting areas, walkways, etc. Of course, rock is much more expensive than organic mulch."

**Dan Songster**-“For Chaparral plants I use nothing other than leaf drop (or on occasion, gravel and rock). On steep hillsides I use shredded redwood (Gorilla hair) to hold water and slow erosion-it tends to knit together and does not float down the hillside in rains as easily as regular mulches-nor does it rot away quickly. Often, I find mulch unneeded in narrow areas especially in the shade where soil tends to stay moist anyway. Generally, I avoid anything that is dyed various colors or made from rubber (yes, it exists as recycled tires!) Also, I follow Mike Evans advice to make sure my mulch has various sizes of materials in it to help the mulch hold together and breakdown at different rates. I make sure to leave some open soils for butterflies and other critters to utilize”

**Note:** After 10 years of stewing on mulches, Mike Evans of Tree of Life Nursery lets off some steam. His mulch tutorial and advice “The Low Down Dirt On Mulch” can be viewed on this YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNU7ozqGq0Y>

Our next **Tips, Tricks, and Techniques** question: *With cooler, thoughtful months approaching, what is your favorite garden-based reading material—Vintage Gardening books? Online blogs or favorite garden/nursery websites? Design magazines? Seed and Nursery catalogs? Botanical-themed mysteries? Titles and/or authors, please!*”

Email your responses to Dan Songster at [songster@cox.net](mailto:songster@cox.net). Please remember to keep replies brief so we can include most of the responses!



**Marsh Fleabane—*Pluchea odorata* var. *odorata***

This late summer bloomer is found in marshy areas and wet soils here and there throughout Orange County. It has been known to sprout up unexpectedly in over-watered gardens!

At three feet or more in height and bearing clusters of light purple flowers, it is a charming plant to come upon in the wild and a possible background addition to the well-watered garden. It is also among the late summer sources of nectar, along with asters and goldenrod.

“Any plant that encourages bird life, supplies the bees with an unexcelled source of honey, gives food to man, furnishes tannin from its bark, protects arid slopes from erosion, paints the landscape with vivid colors and carries joy into the home at Christmas time, when no other berries are available to most Californians, surely deserves the protection of man, whom it serves so well.”

Regarding the Toyon, Ralph D. Cornell, *Toyon Sampler*

**Planting season is coming up! October 23 is CNPS day at Tree of Life Nursery!**