



CALENDAR

- Oct 12 ...Chapter Meeting: Vera's Gardens
- Nov 9 Chapter Meeting, Sage Giveaway
- Nov 12 ... Sage Festival at Tree of Life Nursery

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. The request for this edition is: ***“Do you grow any veggies or fruit trees near/with your natives? Do you find it a good mix or are there drawbacks?”***

Robert Huber: “I had two Nagami kumquat (dwarf) flanking my garage doors for years, and kept them after I went part native. I eventually took them out

when I went fully native, but we were accustomed to the bountiful fruit they provided so I asked our native landscape designer to find a place for a new dwarf Sagami Kumquat. While not native, it strikes a California note especially in my town. Just finished eating the first crop! Sliced on cottage cheese with other fruits!”

Stephanie Pacheco: “I grow my 5 fruit trees (on 1/4 acre of garden) near my water-tolerant natives and I think it is a good mix. I put native plants that can take a little more water near the citrus trees wanting water in summer, but my loquat is drought tolerant, and my cherimoya is watered with grey water underground.”

Thea Gavin: “I’ve been growing natives in/with my fruits and veggies for almost 20 years and have only seen benefits. The natives provide much beauty as well as habitat for all kinds of critters (birds, lizards, bees, butterflies and other fabulous insects) who help with pollination and insect control. Plus . . . the natives I grow need way less water than non-native “ornamentals”. . . so all my landscape water can go toward growing tasty organic edibles. (And, of course, many of the natives are also edible.)”

Laura Curran: “I have native fruit plants, i.e. Catalina cherry and California grape, growing with my other native plants. I appreciate their role as food plants, but the cherry tree produces a lot of fruit which birds and squirrels pick up and distribute all over the sidewalk. So you have to be prepared to sweep the sidewalks every day. I like that people walking by ask if you can eat the fruit, so it sparks interesting conversations about native plants. Children especially love to try the grapes.”

Tina Cremer: “The problem with growing most fruits and vegetables in native gardens is that they have different water needs. I have a peach tree that is about 5 feet from my “bermed” native garden. It’s on a separate irrigation zone on the flat area surrounding the berm so I don’t experience any problems. Vegetable roots are much shorter than most natives so they need to be irrigated for a shorter period of time but more frequently than natives. Most of them love water in the summer, which would be a problem for most CA natives.”

Rama Nayeri: “I have designed with fruit trees near natives and usually they are irrigated on a separate valve with other trees. So far, I have not heard of any issues. But I do tend to leave enough room for walkability. For the purpose of growing edibles I typically suggest that pottery be placed around the garden tall enough to not have to bend over. And the pots certainly add something to the garden.”

Terry LePage: “I made a mistake incorporating citrus and Feijoa (Pineapple Guava) in my low-water (~monthly, 5 mi from ocean) garden. They are hanging on but produce little fruit and don’t look too great. I suspect they both would do well in an every 2-week watering regime.”

Dan Songster: “My home gardens are a mixed bag with several fruit trees and areas where I grow veggies. For me, if the watering needs and the extensive root systems of the fruit and veggies are separated from the natives, either by distance, or by raised beds and containers—things do fine. It is nice to watch the

Chapter meetings take place on the **second Wednesday** of the month at the **Norman P. Murray Community Center**, Sycamore-B room, 24931 Veterans Way, Mission Viejo.
From I-405, exit on La Paz east. Continue for 1.7 miles then turn left onto Veterans Way. The Community Center is on the left.

hummingbirds visit the Cleveland sage and the many little butterflies enjoy the row of California buckwheat while on my way to pick a peach or tomato!"

Our question for the next newsletter: "Of the many native sages (*Salvia* species) which is your favorite and why?"

CHAPTER MEETING

Wednesday, October 12, 7:00 – 9:00 PM

Heat and Drought in Trabuco Canyons—Lessons Learned from Vera's Garden

Speaker: *Elizabeth Wallace*



Elizabeth Wallace and her Oak Tree Gang of volunteers have been creating a native landscape at Vera's Gardens, a 12-acre landscape rehabilitation project in the foothills near Cleveland National Forest.

Much has happened in the last year since Wallace provided our chapter with an overview of the project. The fierce sun and drought conditions (along with hungry deer and gophers) have caused adjustments in the plant palette—reducing the number of non-local natives and even changing the planting methods.

Before and after pictures will illuminate the changing landscape at Vera's, including the successes and failures along the way. Wallace will share the newest native plant palette and discuss how the landscape design has been evolving toward evergreen and local native plants for the front garden areas. Vera's new native landscape is not only healthier for all but is more likely to withstand the increasing temperatures and reduced rainfall at this 12-acre high ridgetop site.

Vera's Sanctuary is owned by a non-profit, The Teen Project, that shelters women who were subject to human trafficking and homelessness. The site was first viewed by Wallace and her team in December 2018, when the Teen Project folks were busy repairing the homes and getting them ready for residents to move in. They were considering using artificial turf to solve some of their landscape problems. Wallace stepped in with a couple of partners to offer an alternative: plant a natural landscape using local native plants instead, which would be healing for the land and for the future residents. Since starting the project almost four



years ago, Wallace and her volunteer gardening team have rehabilitated much of the landscape in the five-home cul de sac in Trabuco Canyon. See the amazing progress on this worthy project on the edge of Orange County wildlands.

Besides leading the Oak Tree Gang in transforming Vera's Gardens, Elizabeth Wallace has been gardening with native plants for more than 30 years. She is an OC-CNPS board member and works with homeowners associations to help them install native plants in their common areas. She is the author of the blog BuckwheatBringsButterflies.com. In 2019, Wallace led *A Buckwheat in Every Garden* campaign in which the chapter gave away more than 1,500

'Dana Point' buckwheat plants to Orange County residents. She is currently leading a similar campaign, *A Sage in Every Garden*, to provide 2,000 four-inch white sage plants free to Orange County homeowners.



Underused Natives—Worthy of a Spot in Our Gardens (Part 1)

Dan Songster

I love growing native plants and have been fooling around with them for decades, growing them here and there, experimenting with growing them in heavy soils, seeing which ones tolerate pruning, a little more shade (or sun) than the books say, which ones enjoy being in a containers—you get the picture. Another thing I enjoy doing is trying out less obvious plants and over the last several years I find that I get much enjoyment from underused natives that have such excellent horticultural qualities that I simply wonder why they are not used much more than they are.

These are natives I don't see very often in other people's gardens, or written about in native gardening articles, or raved about by friends. Why not? Maybe it has been difficult to find in nurseries, are a bit slow growing, might take up too much room, or they may not be used because gardeners are simply unfamiliar with them. Whatever the reason here are several natives I feel should be used more often in our home gardens.



***Adenostema fasciculatum* 'Black Diamond'**—Black Diamond Chamise

A small, compact selection of chamise well-suited for smaller gardens, about 2 or 3 feet tall and wide. Hard to describe the rugged, dense look this has, but understandably it has been used beautifully in bonsai efforts, containers, and rock gardens for quite a while. Also great in dry garden situations, especially in full sun. Charming is not a word you would normally use for a chamise, but it suits this one. Tiny leaves on rigid branches, that are so dark green they almost look black in the late evening.

Why isn't it used more? Not always found in nurseries, but search for it—you will not be sorry.

Gardening Tip: Might require regular light tip-pruning to keep it small and compact. Although this cultivar was discovered in the East Bay area, it loves full sun and heat! In fact those conditions help it stay compact, but this plant can take a bit of shade without any problems. Does not want additional water once established but can be summer watered on occasion, without flinching. Although it would prefer well drained soils, we grow it at Golden West College Native Garden in clay and it looks good. As mentioned, excellent in containers too, possessing a structure suitable for ornamental pruning.

Cneoridium dumosum—Bushrue

Not too big, not too little—3-4 feet tall and wide—this is the only member of the citrus family native to Orange County and its flowers smell like orange blossoms to many. Don't be disappointed when the fruit that develops are not large and edible, but just a tiny version of an orange. Despite its potential dermatological issues (don't touch the sap) garden designer Colin Dunleavy says it is "...a very charming plant and one that you should use if you come across it."

Why isn't it used more? A little hard to find although Tree of Life is currently growing it. And it can be slow to start. The Las Pilitas Nursery site says, "It's not a barn burner, do not plant and expect it to grow up the side of the house." As mentioned, some fear the dermatological problems that can be associated with handling or pruning this plant. Greg Rubin wears gloves when working with it, but it does not affect me.



Gardening Tip: VERY drought tolerant and likes the heat and well drained soils, although it is growing in clay at GWC Native Garden. Nice when mixed in with other coastal sage scrub plants such as the sages and buckwheats. If you need an evergreen native to plant as a foundation for a garden, something that anchors your garden among lower natives this could be it.

It is not a static plant, it is adapted to severe drought (yes, even in the garden) so don't worry if leaf colors dull and some fall off. As Clayton Tschudy, Executive Director of San Diego Canyonlands says, "Under heat stress it will partially defoliate, sometimes developing a golden red coloration in the remaining stressed leaves. But following winter rains this little trooper will burst into exuberant bloom looking for all the world like a weird, miniature orange tree." It rarely (if ever) needs pruning.



Eriogonum arborescens—Santa Cruz Island Buckwheat

A neat-looking, compact mounding little plant that causes no problems and once going looks good all the time. This shrubby buckwheat with narrow, pale green foliage and sturdy, flat-topped inflorescences of creamy white to pink flowers is like a very miniature version of Saint Catherine's Lace. The plant has a lovely structure, with reddish brown trunk that has shredding grey bark. What a beauty! The flowers age over time eventually turning reddish, then chocolate brown like many of the buckwheats, remaining handsome for a long period. Buckwheats (including this one) are excellent additions to habitat gardens, providing pollen and nectar for bees and butterflies and seeds for many creatures. Grows 3 to 4 ft. tall and slightly wider so it will fit in smaller gardens and is also very good container plant.

Why isn't it used more? Not always easy to find and it is a bit slow to establish.

Gardening Tip: Normal to very lean well-drained soils are its preferred home but is known to grow well in clay (and does so at the GWC Native Garden). Especially drought tolerant along the coast and needs little watering after becoming established (just wash the dust off occasionally). In hot interior areas afternoon shade would help it thrive. Reported as normally deer resistant, Elizabeth Wallace says during drought, “the deer in Trabuco Canyon love it.”



Hesperoyucca whipplei—Our Lord's Candle, Foothill Yucca

Perhaps the most lovely flowering structure found on any native plant. About 3-5 years after planting from a one gallon, a flower stalk rises quickly from the rosette of strap like leaves (it is a monocot) to anywhere between 5 and 8 feet. This flower spike is crowded with almost bell shaped flowers of cream and often purple tinted. It may take 4 or 5 years to bloom but while you wait for the magic stalk of beauty, there is a cluster of green-grey leaves that are a definite focal point in small gardens.

Why isn't it used more? Easily available, but understandable that folks would hesitate to plant something with very sharp tips of leaves that are “dangerous” for kids and dogs (and gardeners). Also, it dies completely after its magnificent bloom which is a bummer after that much beauty. Perhaps because it is so common in our foothills, we take it for granted? Maybe we think of it as a wildland plant only and forget we can (or should) plant it in our gardens.

Gardening Tip: Don't plant this beauty near pathways where its spine tipped leaves can snag (or puncture) a passing leg, but wherever it is placed it might be a good idea to prune off the very point tip of each leaf so you can more easily walk past it or pull weeds near it. Depending on the size of your garden, plant one or two and add a new one every few years. That way, as they bloom and then die you have new plants getting ready to take center stage with their breathtaking bloom the following spring. Once the plant dies back you can either leave it as a bird perch for a year or two (Hummingbirds like to sit up on top and look around the garden) or remove it.

Prunus ilicifolia—Hollyleaf Cherry

An easy to grow evergreen plant from our chaparral, this attractive and adaptable native is one of my favorite plants, especially when used as a hedge. Leaves are a glossy green, dark green when planted in areas with a bit of afternoon shade. As its name suggests it does resemble a holly plant. If you have the room to let it grow large, leaving it untrimmed, it has white flowers becoming red berries in fall and as such has excellent habitat value, offering food and cover for birds such as robins, finches, towhees, cedar waxwings and mockingbirds. Generally, deer resistant but I imagine its soft new growth could be nibbled in spring.

Why isn't it used more? Easily available, but when reading the description in nursery catalogs one might be put off by its potential height and width, a problem in smaller gardens. If untrimmed it can get quite huge!

Gardening Tip: Will tolerate any soil and do very well. Will take sun or part shade and once established normally needs NO additional water other than some rainfall. Prune it however you want (selectively or shearing) and it will do quite nicely as a 4-8 foot tall screen, or taller if you wish. And this plant is quite disease resistant. Oh, and take the time to crush and enjoy the amaretto-like fragrance of the leaves.



Salvia apiana 'Compacta'—Compact White Sage

Having all the attributes of white sage, but growing little more than half the size, it tops out at around 3 ft. tall. With gorgeous silver-gray foliage it's beautiful in or out of bloom. The stately stems of white or lavender tinged flowers are taller than the plant maybe reaching 5 feet, with the blossoms attracting pollinators such as carpenter bees, and bumble bees. Like its larger cousin its foliage can be used to make medicinal teas & smudge sticks.

Why isn't it used more? Until recently it was not found that often in nurseries. Currently found at Laguna Hills Nursery in Tustin, and sometimes in Tree of Life Nursery.

Gardening Tip: Heat and drought tolerant, this striking sage makes a wonderful specimen and contrasts beautifully with greener foliaged plants. Plant in full sun with good drainage where it thrives with summer heat and drought. Easy to place in just about any garden (imagine it with Foothill Yucca and the 'Black Diamond' Chamise). The powerfully fragrant foliage is dependably deer resistant.

Scrophularia californica—California Bee Plant

After the rearrangement of the Figwort family, this is the last of our natives left in what is scientifically referred to as the Scrophulariaceae family. It is a native that fits nicely in many garden situations and though it can become tall at 5-6 feet, it stays fairly narrow. It is an unassuming, subtly attractive plant, with its nettle shaped leaves, and appearing in March through June, unique 1/2" maroon flowers that could be considered 'whimsical' on its flower spikes. Besides attracting native bees and hummingbirds, although the volume of nectar per blossom must be small, the leaves can host buckeye and checkerspot butterflies and the seeds feed several seed eating birds. Great habitat plant with a very interesting, upright, lacy form. I get the feeling that once you have it, you may not have to buy new ones since the seeds are easily germinated.

Why isn't it used more? Well, it does imitate death by dying back almost to the ground every year which some gardeners find disconcerting. Also, it is hard to find in nurseries. Moosa Creek Nursery in San Diego County sells them on retail through Green Thumb Nursery in season. Seed from Theodore Payne Foundation is often available.

Gardening Tip: Sun or shade? I see it mostly in sun on coastal field trips, but Annie's Annuals says it is "The perfect California native habitat plant for the shade!" I would try it in several spots. Although I have not seen it happen, it is said that under ideal conditions this herbaceous perennial will spread by underground stems (rhizomes) and can colonize an area. That would be nice! When summer approaches and the plant dies back simply cut it off a few inches above ground level. Salvage some of the seeds for friends and wait for it to spring back with cooler temperatures and winter rains.

Note: There will be more underused natives in **Part 2**. Have a candidate plant? Email me at songster@cox.net



A SAGE IN EVERY GARDEN



OCCNPS, in partnership with Roger's Gardens, will be giving away 2,000 **White sage (*Salvia apiana*)** plants in four-inch pots at events from **November 2022** through **February 2023**.

Our **first giveaway event** will occur on **November 9** at the chapter meeting at the Norman P. Murray Community Center in Mission Viejo. Featured will be ***Saging the World***, a short documentary that spotlights the importance of sage to Indigenous Peoples and the peril it is facing. There will also be information about future giveaway events and volunteer opportunities.

Tree of Life Nursery will be hosting a **Sage Festival** on **November 12** from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. This will be a free family event with educational workshops, interactive booths, shopping, plant giveaways and more.