

DISCOVERY TRAILS

The Wild Garden; A California Native Habitat

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There are so many reasons to advocate planting natives it's difficult to know where to begin. Aside from being low-maintenance, (native trees, shrubs and perennials are a lot less work than mowing, watering, fertilizing and weeding a lawn weekly or more), environmentally responsible (natives use significantly less water), aesthetically congruent (native plants make Southern California look, feel and smell like Southern California) natives provide a home for the bird, butterfly, bee, bug and critter population with which we share this planet.

Gardening for wildlife can be a bit of an aesthetic adjustment to devotees of the obsessively manicured and dead-headed



school. Seed heads on grasses? Leave 'em alone, seed-eaters such as bushtits and goldfinches love them. Plants chewed down to sticks have to be something that you get excited about, not something that causes you to reach for some nasty poison! That old, rotting tree stump is a whole lunch buffet for insects and the insectivorous birds, reptiles and mammals that in turn call them dinner. In short, wildlife gardening causes the gardener to reexamine not only their priorities and motives in the garden, but the impact their choices make on the cycle of life.

The essential elements of a habitat garden (water, food, cover, open areas, nesting and perching sites, nest-building materials) can all be observed and in one of The Arboretum's newest gardens. The Wild Garden: A California Native Habitat is the latest addition to the Roots and Shoots Children's Discovery Node, just north-northeast of the Tule Pond.

The Wild Garden features a central meadow planting of Blue Grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*) and some species from the chaparral and mixed-evergreen plant communities, but the majority of the plants are denizens of the coastal sage scrub. These plants are well-suited to Southern California's dry summers and no irrigation system was installed in The Wild Garden. The new plantings do receive supplemental hose-watering but hopefully as they mature (provided our winter rainfall returns to historic averages) they will require additional water very rarely, if at all.

When we begin to see our gardens as more than just pretty places for flowers and start looking a little closer (are those lacewing eggs?), we cannot help but recognize the interconnectedness of all life on this planet. There is respect for and cooperation with this larger picture when we decide to create a habitat garden. What better classroom in which to teach future generations about the importance of living conscientiously than their own backyards?

Here are ten great natives for habitat gardening:

Asclepias fascicularis, Narrowleaf Milkweed (Monarch butterfly larval host)

Adenostoma fasciculatum, Chamise (Gray Hairstreak butterfly larval host)

Artemisia tridentata, Great Basin Sagebrush (Orioles use dry stems for nesting)

Baccharis pilularis, Coyote Brush (shelter)

Encelia californica, Bush Sunflower (butterfly nectar source; seed is food for Lesser, Lawrence's Goldfinch)

Epilobium canum, California Fuchsia (White-lined sphinx moth larval host and hummingbird nectar plant)

Eriogonum fasciculatum, California Buckwheat (Gray Hairstreak butterfly larval host; food for many seed-eating birds)

Heteromeles arbutifolia, Toyon (fruit is food for the Western Bluebird, American Robin, Band-Tailed Pigeon and others)

Salvia clevelandii, Cleveland Sage (nectar plant for butterflies and hummingbirds, seeds are food for birds)

Sambucus Mexicana, Mexican Elderberry (fruit is food for many birds, flowers attract hummingbirds, butterflies, bees)



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