

## **A Native Plant Garden for Children, Animals and Adults**

Al Kyte 2018

Although my thinking has evolved over the years on issues such as water conservation, pesticides, restoration of natural habitat, and pollinators, what has not changed is my focus on having a garden that is both *natural* and *beautiful*. In this focus on natural beauty I have tried to keep in mind the needs of children and animals as well as grownups. So I want my garden to be a place of 1) discovery for children, 2) refuge for animals, and 3) peace for busy adults. Certain elements of our garden serve all three of these “publics”.

*Stream and Pond.* Our water feature includes off-set falls, plunge pools, meandering riffles, and a pond, thus providing many wonderful dimensions of water play for children. It is also an oasis where birds and animals drink and bathe, and fish and turtles live, and where beautiful sights and sounds invite adults to experience special moments of tranquility.

*Open Woodland Areas.* I believe that the combination of a water feature and open woodland attracts more birds than all other garden features combined. These woodlands feature a wide variety of feeding, perching and nesting options, from open ground and low shrubs to trees of various sizes. Children enjoy these open areas for activities such as throwing and catching, whereas adults welcome the see-through views that such woodland areas offer.

*Manzanita Chaparral.* Mature manzanitas give children the opportunity for a “jungle experience” under an overhead canopy of taller shrubs. With a little pruning help, children can climb through the branches of bushes without touching their feet to the ground in a native plant “jungle gym” or sit in elevated perches. They can also hide or crawl through tunneled areas beneath the bushes. When the berries mature, children love to gather them, help make a cider, and drink it as native people did years before. Birds and animals find an assortment of seeds, berries and insects under the protective cover of shrubs. Adults appreciate the low-maintenance, year-around fresh green foliage and gnarled reddish bark of the manzanitas.

*Rock Outcroppings and Remnant Walls.* Children love to jump from rock to rock, climb among outcroppings, and use such areas for doll or action-figure play. Birds, small mammals, and reptiles use rocky areas as perches and hunting areas and for protective cover. Adults are drawn to the natural beauty that rock affords as a textural, aged-looking backdrop for their plants. Elevated rocky areas also bring a dramatic counterpoint to nearby flat areas and trails.

*Artifacts such as rustic benches, wagon wheels, pumps, and other gear from old homesteads.* Animals also use such human-life artifacts for perching or hunting, and children incorporate them as props for their pretend role playing. Adults enjoy the basic beauty of such points of interest as they stroll through the garden or pause to reflect on life in the past.

*Woodpiles.* Animals hunt or hide in stacked-wood piles. Adults appreciate this attractive, natural-looking way to store firewood that also provides a convenient wall behind which crushed rock and gravel can be stored out of view. Children hide here, create a tee-pee campsite, and mix the crushed rock with leaves, flower petals and water for their imaginary “food”.

*Sandpiles.* Sand provides a good mixing material for landscaping and provides children with a great place for sand castles and treasure hunts. Reptiles also lay eggs in such sandy areas.

*Meandering Trails.* Children use the meandering trails for running and chasing games, while adults like to walk through a garden to be able to see each planting area up close. Even the birds and animals sometimes prefer the easy access afforded by these obstacle-free routes.