

Native Plants: Al's Strategies for Season-Long Blooming

A few years ago a nursery employee tried to dissuade me from buying native plants by saying that California native plant gardens are only beautiful in the spring. Obviously her concept of garden beauty was limited to flowering color, which, in truth, does peak for many species during the spring months. That conversation, however, challenged me to see how much flowering color I could get in our native plant garden throughout the summer and fall seasons. My strategies for achieving this have included the following: 1) identifying and emphasizing long-blooming species, 2) planting early-season favorites of a desired flowering color near late-season bloomers of the same color, 3) planting the same species in both sunny and shady areas. (Those planted in the sun often bloom earlier, whereas those in the shade often keep blooming longer.), and 4) deadheading certain species to extend their blooming season.

Blooming Strategies by Color:

1. *White*

The *Eschscholzia californica* 'Alba' variant of the California poppy is my best long-bloomer in this color, especially when frequently deadheaded. My favorite white look, however, comes from an early-season favorite, *Mimulus bifidus* 'white' (White Monkey Flower), white can be planted near a late-season white favorite such as *Achillea millefolium* ('Grey-leafed Yarrow').

2. *Yellow*

Here I have been fortunate to find two season-long bloomers, *Dendromecon hardfordii* (Island Bush Poppy) in a large bush size, and *Hymenoxys acaulis* (Sundance Daisy), in a low perennial. I am also able to consistently show a yellow color in certain other locations by planting early season favorites, *Eriogonum umbellatum* (Sulfur Buckwheat) or *Madia elegans, vernalis* (Showy Madia) near a late season yellow favorite such as *Grindelia camporum* (Valley Gum Plant).

3. *Orange*

I love orange in the garden, especially when planted near complementary blue flowers. My best long-bloomer in this color are deadheaded poppies, either *Eschscholzia californica* (California Poppy) or *Eschscholzia californica* ('Apricot Chiffon' variant). I will also plant beautiful orange shades of monkey flowers such as *Mimulus alatus* (Orange Monkey Flower) near a late-blooming favorite such as *Sphaeralcea ambigua* (Scarlet Mallow),

(over)

4. **Red**

I love to have splashes of red in the garden. My best long-bloomer in this color is a variant of our poppy, *Eschscholzia californica* 'Red chief'. Another strategy is to plant an area for seasonal progression of red that starts with *Ribes sanguineum* 'Elk River' (Red Flowering Currant), continues with *Penstemon eatonii* (Eaton's Penstemon), adds *Eriogonum grande rubescens* (Rosy Buckwheat) during the summer, and finishes dramatically with *Epilobium cana* (California Fuchsia).

5. **Pink**

The best success I have had in finding a long-blooming pink flower is with *Penstemon newberryi* (Mountain Pride) but only when kept in a pot. I have had my best luck with pink in the early season with plants such as *Allium unifolium* (Meadow onion) and *Sidalcea malvaeflora* (Checker Bloom). Later in the season I get summer pink bloom with patches of *Eriogonum grande rubescens* (Rosy Buckwheat).

6. **Purple**

My longest-blooming purple species is *Verbena lilacina* 'De La Mina' (Verbena) which blooms throughout the entire growing season. I also plant *Eschscholzia californica* ('Purple Gleam' variant of California Poppy) in the same locations with later blooming *Aster chilensis* 'Point St. George' (California Aster).

7. **Blue**

Penstemon heterophyllus (Foothill Penstemon) can provide some blue color throughout much of the summer when planted in shady as well as sunny locations. I also have had two recent plants of *Solanum umbelliferum* 'Spring Frost' (Nightshade) that have bloomed throughout the growing season. Other blue favorites, including *Phacelia campanularia* (Desert Canterbury Bells), *Phacelia viscida* (Sticky Phacelia), and *Ceanothus* 'Ray Hartman' (California Lilac), have typically completed their blooming by mid-summer.

This is not a comprehensive list of long-blooming possibilities. I am sure there are other plants that might serve this purpose as well as or perhaps even better than those I have mentioned. Nonetheless, I have already learned enough to be impressed with the flowering beauty that is

possible throughout the calendar year in our California native plant gardens. Our gardens are far more than spring shows.