

Why Select California Native Plants?

Al Kyte May 2014

I can think of at least five good reasons to do so.

1. To Conserve Water. More than just a response to the current drought, we need to think in the long term. You don't have to be prophetic to realize we have reached the limits of our water resources and already know that water is the precious "oil of tomorrow." In some Arizona communities, lawns are already prohibited. It is just a matter of time before California will have to follow suit. Why not be on the leading edge of the wave and start converting your plantings to drought-resistant plants, such as California natives?
2. To start Living within our Climate. Throughout our past, we have had the luxury of being able to waste water, but that practice has caught up with us. Lawns are the natural marshes of our gardens and are appropriate to wet climates. But they have never been well suited to California's dry Mediterranean climate nor to our clay soils. We need to start thinking seriously about how much water our lawns use and how our climate is best suited to drought-resistant California native plants.
3. To Restore Lost Habitat. Decades of development of our landscape have removed much of the plant life that grew here naturally. Blooming plants that our native pollinators depended on for survival are far fewer now. As we lose those plants, we are also losing the important pollinating insects themselves that many of our most important food plants depend on for their survival. It is becoming apparent that home gardeners can be decisive in helping to reverse this trend--by planting the native plants that our pollinators depend on. Restoring natural habitat just doesn't occur when we plant lawns and most of the available exotic-flowering plants.
4. To Save Lives. Even our beloved butterflies are suffering from this loss of habitat as well as from our widespread use of pesticides. Butterflies that were once common in our gardens are now seldom seen. There is increasing evidence that pesticides are also harmful to higher forms of life.
5. To Create Natural Beauty. Most people don't yet realize that California Native Plant gardens can offer year-around color and natural beauty. Designs can incorporate evergreen foundations, lawn substitutes (i.e. low manzanitas), and a range of flowering plants that provide blooms from early to late throughout our long growing season. Native plant gardens offer beautiful surroundings to our homes without wasting the water we do now. Why not think ahead and start replacing at least part of your lawn?