

Reptiles & Amphibians in Idell's Garden 2007

These range throughout the Bay Region unless specified otherwise.

Note: it is hard to identify the garter snakes without catching them so there is one listed that may be only a possibility. They move very fast!

Reptile/Amphibian	Range & Behavior
Western Fence Lizard Blue-bellied Lizard <i>Sceloporus occidentalis</i>	Not in dense woods; but in grasslands, open woodlands especially around rocks, fallen trees, brush, old lumber or buildings; eats many kinds of insects and spiders; has keeled pointed scales on upper part of body, blue patches on belly. Eggs laid in pits in slightly damp loose soil in mid May to mid July and hatch from mid July to mid September. Active February-November. Found as above plus under tarps.
Southern Alligator Lizard (<i>Gerrhonotus multicarinatus</i>) <i>Elgeria multicarinatus</i> <i>multicarinatus</i>	In open woodlands, grasslands and chaparral; found in woodpiles, brush heaps, shaded thickets and under rocks and logs. I also found large ones in folds of tarps, under cat dishes (opening down) accidentally covered with dirt, and in between stacked layers of corrugated plastic. Eats sow bugs, spiders, snails, grasshoppers, crickets and beetles. In my garden, they look like a cross between greenish gray Northern ones and the reddish Southern ones. Lay eggs May to August, hatch in about two months. Active from March to November.
Pacific Gopher Snake <i>Pituophis catenifer catenifer</i>	Not in heavy forests; in grasslands, woodlands, brushy areas; eats mice, gophers, rabbits, and lizards, sometimes birds and eggs. They have same food source as rattlesnakes so killing off gopher snakes allows more habit for rattle snakes. (Compared to rattlers, they have a smaller head and do not have the diamond-like body pattern.) See fairly regularly in garden. Need MORE to slow down the gophers! Season is March or April to November. Probably breed in April and May, hatchlings emerge after about one and one-half months.
Garter Snake <i>Thamnophis sirtalis fitchi</i> – Valley Garter Snake or a variant of Kingsnake?	<i>T. sirtalis</i> is one of the most common garter snakes.. My geographical area is in between the Valley Garter snake and the California Red Sided Garter Snake. The ones in my garden look more like the Valley Garter Snake—dark blackish-brown backgrounds with deep yellow back stripes plus lighter stripes but have no red markings. A king snake variant with longitudinal stripes is another possibility. They are found frequently around heavy mulch, then after the frog ponds went in, became common there
Coast or Terrestrial Garter Snake <i>Thamnophis elegans terrestris</i>	Mostly terrestrial. In meadows, brush covered hillsides and stream borders. Eats slugs, earthworms, salamanders, lizards, snakes, mice, birds, slugs; I found one that had eaten so many tadpoles in the pond that it could not move. This one has yellow stripe on it's back and blackish-brown and red flecked sides. This one is less commonly seen in my yard than the other garter snake above. Breeding activity during April and May. Young are born in the fall in transparent, fluid filled sacs. Active from March to October or November.
Diablo Range Gartersnake <i>Thamnophis atratus zaxanthus</i>	This mostly aquatic snake looks most like the one found in my garden. It has no red on it and unless I catch it and identify it, I cannot tell the difference between this one and the one above. In addition to water areas, it is also in woodland, brush and forest and grassy areas.
Common Kingsnake <i>Lampropeltis getulus</i>	Woodlands, grasslands and open forests; more common in warmer parts near rocky stream courses or rock outcrops in open woodlands; they eat snakes, lizards, amphibians, birds, eggs and rodents. These kingsnakes have beautiful cross bands of black and white. I have seen both large ones and a baby but sightings are rare. Most activity is in April-June but are around their habitat April to November.
California Slender Salamander <i>Batrachoseps attenuatus</i>	Mostly in leaf-littered areas under oaks and redwoods. I find them regularly in my yard under damp boards, under leaves, & inside rotten logs; they eat bugs, sow bugs, aphids, termites, beetles and ants. They look like tiny dark snakes or a large earthworm with miniature legs. Unlike other Bay Area salamanders, this one lays eggs in the winter. Their season is October to June.
Ensatina (Salamander) <i>Ensatina eschscholtzi</i>	Found mostly in Coast Redwoods but also in Blue Oak woodlands and soft chaparral not far from a stream in the shady forest borders or grasslands; frequents damp places with thick mats of leaves and rotting stumps. Eats earthworms, sow bugs, millipedes, spiders, insects, crickets and beetles. Eggs are laid in April or May and the female stay with them until they hatch in the fall. Not sure if this is the correct name for this salamander I found under a pile of leaf bags last year.
Arboreal Salamander <i>Aneides lugubris</i>	Habitat is mostly Coast Live Oak woodland. They live in watered areas all year and others in October or November to June with the young hatching just as the rains begin. Favorite foods are insects, sow bugs, centipedes and Stebbins says probably fungus. I have only seen these twice—once in a bag of compost and the other time, under some boards.

(continued)

Pacific Treefrog <i>(Pseudacris) Hyla regilla</i>	In grasslands, chaparral, forests, farmland; breeds in marshes, lakes, ponds, ditches and slow-moving streams. Usually found among low vegetation near water. Frogs eat leafhoppers, ants, flies, beetles, spiders; and ants. They breed from January to May and lay eggs on submerged plant stems or on pond bottoms. Tadpoles scrape algae & microbes off rocks, eat filamentous algae, and feed on diatoms and pollen. In my ponds they also eat duckweed (Lemnaceae) and slugs too. Tadpoles are devoured by snakes and birds with very few surviving. Frogs lived in the neighborhood until the seven year drought then were re-introduced from the lower levels of the canyon.
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Sources:

1. Much data copied directly from Reptiles & Amphibians of the San Francisco Bay Region by Robert Stebbins, UC Press, 1974
2. <http://www.californiaherps.com/index.html> This site has great photos and range maps.

(See photos of my garden for two of many experiments with lizards “homes”.)