

# Growing California Natives

## What are native plants?

A native plant is a plant that is native to a specific region, where it grows naturally and co-evolved with other life forms. Native plants make up the foundation of an ecosystem and have specific inter-relationships within it, such as providing food and shelter for a wide variety of organisms. Since the arrival of European people and the plants and seeds they introduced, native plants have had new competition for survival. In some area, native plant populations have been replaced by "invasive" species that out-compete the natives for the sun, soil, and water needed for plant growth. For this reason, restorative landscaping with natives has become quite a popular practice.

## Growing native plants in your garden can provide many benefits.

Native plants are found in all types of climatic zones, so you will always be able to find a plant suitable to your growing conditions. For this reason, native plants are often easier to care for. By growing endemic native plants, you can begin to restore the natural biodiversity of your region. Other benefits include:

- Native plants can attract animal and insect populations in your garden by providing the habitat that nature originally provided for them.
- Native plants selected from your growing region will need little or no additional irrigation once the plant is established.
- Because native plants have evolved with other plant and animal species from their region, the amount of pest disturbance is usually lower.

## Tips for planting natives

Natives are best planted from late fall through early spring. Taking advantage of winter rains helps get plants off to a good start. To increase your rate of success of direct sown seeds, it is advisable to irrigate until seeds have germinated and made early growth. With perennial plantings, supplemental irrigation is suggested for the first summer. After they are established, native plants should require relatively low maintenance.

When direct sowing seeds such as wildflowers, it is important to create a good seedbed to promote firm seed to soil contact, provide consistent moisture, and keep weeds under control. One method of weed control is to pre-irrigate the seedbed to be planted to sprout your weed seeds and then remove them. After you remove the weeds, try not to till your soil, as you might bring up more weed seed. Once you have sown your seeds in a well-prepared seedbed, a gentle tamping can help to ensure seed to soil contact.

## Choosing natives

When purchasing native plants, it is best to buy from nurseries that specialize in native plants. Native plant nurseries often collect seed and propagate plant material from plants that are acclimatized to your particular region.

## Additional Resources on California Native Plants

- California Native Plant Society has a database of thousands of California natives, as well as links to educational resources related to native plants and local chapters to find out about natives in your region. Published a book called *Southern California Native Plants for School Gardens*. <http://www.cnps.org>
- Cornflower Farms (Sacramento) is a nursery specializing in native. Download their Wild Gardening catalog for many plant recommendations. <http://www.cornflowerfarms.com>
- Growing Native. Lots of articles on native California plants, landscaping and California plant care. <http://www.growingnative.com>
- Las Pilitas Native Nursery (San Diego and San Luis Obispo) has a detailed online plant database as well as tips for planting and landscaping with native plants. <http://www.laspilitas.com>
- Larner Seeds (Marin) sells seeds of native wildflowers, grasses, trees and shrubs, plus plants, tools and books such as *Gardening With a Wild Heart: Restoring California's Native Landscapes at Home* by Judith Larner Lowry. <http://www.larnerseeds.com>