



Redwood Barn Nursery

1607 Fifth Street Davis, California

Landscaping for Wildlife

Happy Pollinator Week!

In case you missed it, June 17- 24 was National Pollinator Week.

Per the USDA, "This week and every week, it is critically important that we protect pollinators and their habitats.... Pollinator species, such as bees, other insects, birds, and bats play a critical role in producing more than 100 crops grown in the United States."

For those wondering, bats pollinate some tropical and subtropical fruit species such as mangoes, and bananas. The Cavendish banana, which is by far the most common in markets in the US, is parthenocarpic (meaning it sets fruit without pollination). But many other types of bananas consumed around the world do rely on pollination by fruit bats.

I'm very happy to see people planting flowers that attract butterflies and bees, and the focus on pollinators is well-deserved. It's also very easy to attract pollinators. Just have a lot of plants blooming all the time. Plan and plant so you have flowers in every season. We have lots of resources locally for plant selection:

The UC Davis Bee Haven, <https://beegarden.ucdavis.edu/>

Art Shapiro's Butterfly Site, <https://butterfly.ucdavis.edu/butterfly-gardening-sacramento-valley>

But there are lots of less glamorous organisms out there in your garden and landscape performing all sorts of ecological functions including, but not limited to, pest control.

For example, as I walk out to my vegetable garden each evening, I'm greeted by mockingbirds and scrub jays. These gregarious birds feed on many garden pests!

According to the Audubon Society the Northern Mockingbird "feeds heavily on insects in late spring and summer, especially beetles, grasshoppers, caterpillars, ants, wasps, also many others. Also eats spiders, snails, sowbugs, earthworms, and rarely crayfish and small lizards. Fall and winter diet leans heavily to berries and wild fruits, sometimes a few cultivated fruits." Mockingbirds can provide good control of garden pests including leaf-footed bugs, stink bugs, and harlequin bugs, all of which can congregate in great numbers and damage fruits and vegetables.

Scrub-jays eat "a wide variety of insects, especially in summer, as well as a few spiders and snails. Moth caterpillars make up a major percentage of the items fed to the young." Problems with redhumped caterpillars eating the leaves of your cherries, walnuts, and redbuds? Scrub-jays are happy to help.

These are just some of our visible (and rather noisy) garden helpers. Less obvious, but equally beneficial, are many insects that feed on aphids and scale insects. Some you can see: lace bugs, ladybird beetles, leatherwing beetles, and more. Others are much less visible, such as the tiny wasps that parasitize the aphids. In a garden or landscape with sufficient diversity you will often find these beneficial insects provide nearly complete pest control.



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Some you'll encounter at night. Possums and skunks will feed on snails and grubs and are entirely beneficial.

So rather than just gardening for pollinators, I suggest broadening the concept to landscaping for wildlife.

The principles for attracting and keeping birds in your garden are simple: provide cover, food sources, water, and nesting sites.

Providing water can be easy: a bird bath, or even just a bowl of water that refills from a nearby drip or sprinkler system.

The most important part is to provide cover: give them places to quickly hide when predators come by. Birds like dense foliage, twiggy or thorny plants where they can take refuge. Choose shrubs and small trees that provide flowers, perhaps some berries, and then minimize your pruning. Allowing shrubs to grow more naturally encourages nesting.

Here are some common, adaptable landscape shrubs that can be part of your wildlife strategy.

Arbutus

The genus includes strawberry tree and madrone.

- *Arbutus* 'Marina' is an interspecific hybrid, a very popular evergreen tree that blooms nearly year-around, sets small crops of orange fruit. Hummingbirds love the flowers.
- *A. unedo* sets very large crops of fruit, so the species is considered a high-litter tree. Dwarf forms such as Compacta, Oktoberfest, and Elfin King can be good choices, but they do also litter. The fruit is edible but not especially tasty.
- Native madrone (*A. menziesii*) is not successful here.

Baccharis

Coyote brush, *B. pilularis*

Tolerant of some summer irrigation here but also fine without. Said to be resistant to crown and root rot.

The species can grow very rapidly to ten feet or more, with an upright habit. Very fragrant flowers on male plants are considered attractive to many beneficial insects. There are low-growing ground cover forms as well.

Buddleia

Sold as butterfly bush or nectar bush.

Nearly constant bloom late spring through summer, strongly attractive to butterflies and hummingbirds. Looks best with regular irrigation in summer. *Buddleia davidii* reseeds in rainy climates and is considered invasive in the Pacific Northwest and the UK.

Can be pruned hard, as they bloom on new growth, but annual pruning isn't necessary. Older shrubs may benefit from renewal pruning.

- Sterile interspecific forms are readily available now. They bloom more and over a longer season, and most are compact growers. CranRazz, and the Buzz and Flutterbye series of cultivars, are good choices.



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- Other species of Buddleia have great potential for landscape uses: *B. alternifolia* (fountain butterfly bush) gets more than ten feet tall and wide. *B. marrubiifolia* (woolly butterfly bush), a southwestern species, has grown very well for me with very limited irrigation.

Callistemon

Bottlebrush

Very drought tolerant, showy landscape shrubs that bloom in cycles every 2 to 3 months, year-around. Can be grown without irrigation once established. Very attractive to hummingbirds and bees.

Elaeagnus

Silverberry

There are several species, all large shrubs with extremely fragrant flowers and some with edible fruit. Bees are very attracted to the flowers and birds like the fruit. Drought tolerant, best left unpruned and given plenty of space as all can get ten feet tall and wide. Most have thorns. Great bird habitat.

Feijoa sellowiana (now *Acca*)

Pineapple guava

Edible flowers in spring are popular with larger birds such as mockingbirds. Fruit is large and tasty and can be quite abundant. Very drought tolerant, nice dense growth habit, and suitable to be trained up as a small tree.

Grevillea

Huge group of Australian shrubs with many cultivars and hybrids. Most are dense and somewhat prickly. Very drought tolerant. Heavy winter bloom, and many have some flowers in every season. Some are sensitive to phosphorus. Never fertilize grevilleas.

Heteromeles

Toyon

One of our most successful native shrubs here. Grows steadily a couple of feet a year, eventually getting quite large. Flowers attract beneficial insects. Berries are very showy in winter. Very drought tolerant but okay with summer irrigation. In fact, toyon appears to be resistant to root and crown rots. Yellow-fruited form (Davis Gold) is especially attractive planted near the red-fruited species for contrast.

Leucophyllum

Texas ranger

Very drought and heat tolerant. Flowers are extremely attractive to honeybees. Varieties differ in vigor. Green Cloud variety grows quickly to six feet or more and has good density. Flowers heavily, though briefly, in 2-to-3-month cycles spring through fall.



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Mahonia

Now classed in the genus *Berberis* but still widely sold as Mahonias.

These are very tough, durable shrubs. They can tolerate drought but look lusher with irrigation. Sun or shade. Mid-winter yellow flowers attract beneficial insects. The blue fruit attracts birds in summer. Leaves can be formidably spiny. Great cover for songbirds.

- *M. aquifolium*, Oregon grape, is a coastal native species, growing to about 6 feet high in our area. Compacta is a tighter-growing variant that tops out at about 4 feet.
- *M. lomariifolia* and *M. bealei* are very large shrubs with especially spiny foliage. Very dramatic if given sufficient room.

Phlomis fruticosa

Jerusalem sage

Dense sage-grey leaves on a tough, sprawling shrub that can get several feet across. Suppresses weeds when established. Large whorls of yellow flowers, off and on spring through fall, that look like sage flowers but smell like carnations. Very drought tolerant, ok with light shade.

Rosmarinus officinalis (now classed as *Salvia rosmarinus*)

Rosemary

Very drought tolerant, can take very hot sunny locations. Flowers in winter are showy and attractive to bees. Small songbirds like the cover. Most are spreading shrubs, but some are upright and can get large.

Tuscan Blue variety has vivid blue-violet flowers heavily in winter and lightly nearly year-around. It gets to 5 to 6 feet tall with an upright and then sprawling growth habit. Very strong-scented foliage is excellent in cooking. This is one of the strongest growers and can shade out and suppress weeds quickly. Especially pungent foliage is excellent for culinary use.

Salvia

Ornamental sage

It is easy to have year-around bloom with flowers very attractive to pollinators just by mixing species and cultivars of salvias.

- Dara's Choice is a hybrid (*Salvia sonomensis* x *mellifera*) to about 3 feet tall and as much as 8 feet across. It has especially showy and abundant flowers in April and May.
- *Salvia* species from the American southwest and Mexico (*Salvia greggii*, *S. microphylla*, hybrids sometimes sold as *S. jamesonii*) prolong the bloom season considerably, with flowers nearly year-around and especially heavy bloom in late summer and fall. They are sometimes called autumn sage. Phenomenal for drawing *Xylocopa* bees and hummingbirds.
- Mexican sage, *S. leucantha*, sprawls out several feet. Vivid purple flowers in fall and even into winter. Best pruned back each season.

All salvias attract hummingbirds and copious pollinators, and more.

Xylosma congestum



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Shiny xylosma

The late summer bloom is not very noticeable because the flowers are chartreuse and blend with the foliage, but the flowers are very attractive to honeybees and other pollinators. This is one of the toughest, most adaptable shrubs for our area. Drought tolerant but grows lush with irrigation. It can be left unpruned, then trained up as a tree and it makes an effective understory shrub or small tree.

Deciduous flowering shrubs and small trees

Cercis

Redbud

- *C. occidentalis*, Western redbud, is a popular native but has some issues here. Sudden branch dieback is a frequent problem. Leaves burn and become spotty in hot afternoon sun. Mixed in with other shrubs as an understory species, it can be very attractive. Looks best when lightly shaded. Flowers attract bees; leafcutter bees use the foliage.
- *C. canadensis texensis* 'Oklahoma' is the best redbud for our area, an excellent small tree.

Chaenomeles

Flowering quince.

Very undemanding shrub that blooms in the middle of winter, strongly attractive to bees and hummingbirds. Dense and somewhat thorny, they sucker from the base to make small thickets which make great bird cover. Sun or light shade; moderately drought tolerant.

Varieties range from low-growing (3 feet), medium height (5 – 6 feet), and even some that get to ten feet or more.

Ribes

Currants

A useful group of shrubs for mid-winter bloom. Two native species include:

- *Ribes aureum*, a sprawling shrub with showy yellow flowers, edible (though astringent) fruit that attracts songbirds. Forms a thicket over time.
- *Ribes malvaceum* often blooms in December here. Elegant growth habit, great understory shrubs.

Syringa

Lilacs

Specifically attractive to swallowtails. Lilacs bloom here late March through April. The classic, sweetly-fragrant French hybrid lilac (*Syringa vulgaris*) can be quite drought tolerant and if allowed to grow naturally can become a small tree. Habit is open. Other species are available with more spreading, denser growth habit.

Plant so there's something blooming every month of the year, allow your shrubs to grow more naturally, and provide some water nearby, and your yard can become a wildlife habitat!



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Texas ranger (*Leucophyllum frutescens*) is native to the Southwest and northern Mexico. Very tolerant of heat and drought (I don't irrigate mine at all). It blooms heavily for short periods, off and on from late spring through summer. One of the most bee-active plants you can grow.



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Commonly called Oregon grape, this is a scratchy-leaf shrub that makes great cover for songbirds. Blooms December through February with bright yellow flowers that attract beneficial insects, followed by berries that are eaten by birds. Tolerant of shade and drought.



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The chaparral currant, native to the California coast range, always blooms for me in December and is heavily visited by our native hummingbirds. Easy to grow in light shade.



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Redbuds are popular for their early spring bloom. The flowers are visited by bees and the leaves are used for nesting by leafcutter bees. The Oklahoma variety of eastern redbud is more adaptable than our western species.



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The flowers of male coyote brush, *Baccharis pilularis*, are powerfully fragrant in the evening. Shown blooming here in early fall. Many beneficial insects visit the flowers, and the shrub provides great cover for birds.



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Ornamental sages (*Salvia* species and hybrids) are adaptable, drought-tolerant, sun-loving shrubs and perennials very well suited to the Sacramento Valley. They feature intense flower colors and long bloom season, with species and varieties available for flowers nearly every month of the year.



This hybrid of California native shrubs spreads out, forming a dense cover which can suppress weeds. Like most of the native sages, it blooms in spring at the end of the rainy season. Ornamental sages (*Salvia* species and hybrids) are adaptable, drought-tolerant, sun-loving shrubs and perennials very well suited to the Sacramento Valley. They feature intense flower colors and long bloom season, with species and varieties available for flowers nearly every month of the year.



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Salvia gesneriflora Mole Poblano

Mole Poblano is a variety of a Mexican sage species (*Salvia gesneriflora*). I've been impressed by the long bloom season (this picture was taken mid-January). Our winter resident hummingbirds especially like the flowers.



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Salvia Hot Lips

With dozens of hybrids of the southwestern sages now available, some really stand out. Hot Lips has bicolor flowers, and then sometimes 'sports' to all-white or all-red flowers on the same plant.

Compact growth habit, drought tolerance, and blooms from spring through fall make Hot Lips very attractive to bees, and hummingbirds, and gardeners.