

A Garden of Four or Five

It is planting season in California. Although gardens may not look their best right now, it is the time of year for Californians to be garden-crazy. It is a little difficult because we seem to get the gardening bug when everything is in bloom. Those who live in places where winter means snow and cold are cleaning up the garden beds in preparation for their winter slumber. When springtime warmth occurs and new buds appear, the airwaves are abuzz with gardening advertisements. Our countrymen and countrywomen don their garden gloves and get busy. We look on with envy, knowing that we should be enjoying the wildflowers but not adding plants to our gardens. So do not wait until spring. Put on those garden gloves right now and get planting!

If you are new to gardening with California native plants, you might be feeling a bit overwhelmed and wondering how to go. There is lots of enthusiasm, but some exasperation as well, as novices try to navigate the world of native plants and the bizarre language of botanical names. I feel for these people - there is much to learn and mistakes to be made. Still, it is a fun journey and I thought that it might help to provide short plant lists, no more than five plant types, for different conditions. The plants are selected for being easy to grow, a good size for relatively small home garden beds, and fairly flowery and neat all year long. The three gardening conditions are: **Dry River Bed** (sunny, little summer water), **Small Garden Space for Flowery Plants** (sun to some afternoon shade, some summer water), **Woodland or Shade Garden** (part shade, best in afternoon, little to moderate summer water).

Dry River Bed

So let's start with a sunny garden spot with possibly some afternoon shade that will get very little supplemental water after the plants become established. Add some lovely boulders and place the following plants in and around them:

- Canyon Prince giant ryegrass
- Deergrass
- White sage
- Pigeon Point coyote brush

Give these plants lots of room - they get big. While the plants are young and small, seed with California wildflowers, such as California poppies, tidy tips, globe gillias and birds eye gillias. Be sure to keep the annual wildflowers from growing over and crowding your new bunchgrasses and perennials.

Garden south of the Lanz Outdoor classroom at [Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden](#). I have used this image often to demonstrate how nice a garden looks when the number of different plant types is limited. The repetition of the same plants is very comforting to the eye. From the bottom of the picture to the top: white sage (*Salvia apiana*), deergrass (*Muhlenbergia rigens*), and in front of the building, Pigeon Point coyote brush (*Baccharis pilularis* 'Pigeon Point'). Russian River wild grape (*Vitis californica* 'Russian River') is on the trellis.

Weeding Wild Suburbia

All About Gardening with California Native Plants

<http://www.weedingwildsuburbia.com>



Another image I show often is this one of a garden in Claremont, California. The use of decomposed granite as a mulch, along with large boulders creates a very naturalist setting for the Pigeon Point coyote brush (front), deerglass (center), and Canyon Prince giant rye (*Leymus condensatus* 'Canyon Prince') (further back and to the left). This picture was taken in spring 2007. See the picture below for the proper plant spacing.

Weeding Wild Suburbia

All About Gardening with California Native Plants

<http://www.weedingwildsuburbia.com>



Looks sparse at planting, but it filled in beautifully. This was taken two years earlier, spring 2005.

Weeding Wild Suburbia

All About Gardening with California Native Plants

<http://www.weedingwildsuburbia.com>



A boulder surrounded by deergrass and Pigeon Point coyote brush makes a lovely arrangement.

Weeding Wild Suburbia

All About Gardening with California Native Plants

<http://www.weedingwildsuburbia.com>



Small Sunny Spot with Frou-frou Flowers

I don't have any pictures of all of these plants being used together, but I think it would make a really, really girly garden. The list is:

- W.R. seaside daisy
- De La Mina verbena
- Margarita BOP penstemon
- David's Choice sand hill sage
- California poppies

The names are even girly. (I hope I don't get into trouble for being so politically incorrect. Sorry...)

W.R. seaside daisy (*Erigeron* 'W.R.') in a mass planting at [Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden](#).



Margarita BOP penstemon (*Penstemon heterophyllus* 'Margarita BOP') at the [Maloo Foundation Garden](#) (don't miss their Veteran's Day distinguished speaker garden series).



De La Mina verbena (*Verbena lilacina* 'De La Mina') at Maloof.

Weeding Wild Suburbia

All About Gardening with California Native Plants

<http://www.weedingwildsuburbia.com>



David's Choice sand hill sage (*Artemisia pycnocephala* 'David's Choice') makes a nice foil for all of these wild flowers. It is long-lasting; all it needs is a bit of pinching when it is young and then snip the flower stalks as they form since the plant is grown for its tight round form and blue-gray color, not its flowers.

Weeding Wild Suburbia

All About Gardening with California Native Plants

<http://www.weedingwildsuburbia.com>



California poppies (*Eschscholzia californica*) in front of boulders and deergrass at the South Pasadena Nature Park.

Weeding Wild Suburbia

All About Gardening with California Native Plants

<http://www.weedingwildsuburbia.com>



As I said I haven't seen these all used together but they would make such a lovely and colorful garden. The bright orange poppies might be a bit much, though. What do you think?

Woodland or Shade Garden

The plants in this list will need a bit of sun in order to bloom, with morning sun being best. I planted some of these together in a large pot that is kept in the shade. The coral bells continue to bloom, though they have crowded out the giant chain fern that once shared the space.

- coral bells (Wendy, Santa Ana Cardinal, Genevieve, or other cultivar)
- western columbine
- California gray rush
- Eve Case coffeeberry

Cultivar of coral bells (*Heuchera*), possibly 'Genevieve'.

Weeding Wild Suburbia

All About Gardening with California Native Plants

<http://www.weedingwildsuburbia.com>



Western columbine (*Aquilegia formosa*)

Weeding Wild Suburbia

All About Gardening with California Native Plants

<http://www.weedingwildsuburbia.com>



California gray rush (*Juncus patens*) in my woodland garden. May be 'Elk Blue' or 'Carman's Gray' - I planted both. Growing with a toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*) that is in bloom, and creeping snowberry (*Symphoricarpos mollis*).

Weeding Wild Suburbia

All About Gardening with California Native Plants

<http://www.weedingwildsuburbia.com>



Eve Case coffeeberry (*Rhamnus californica* 'Eve Case') replaced raphiolepis as foundation plants in my front yard. It is growing with giant chain fern (*Woodwardia fimbriata*), Pacific Coast Hybrid iris, and a rather sad looking *Ficus benjamina* in a pot - a shame those plants never die.

Weeding Wild Suburbia

All About Gardening with California Native Plants

<http://www.weedingwildsuburbia.com>



Hope this helps with the upcoming plant sales. I will be volunteering at the [Rancho plant sale](#) this Saturday. The list is awesome - 32 pages!!