

# Wild Suburbia - native plant gardening

After many years, lots of writing and rewriting, and tons of rejections, it is finally out! In August, [Heyday Books](#) released my book, [Wild Suburbia - Learning to Garden with Native Plants](#). And now a new chapter begins - promotion. Not my favorite thing to do, although the first book talk and signing, held on September 1st at [Theodore Payne Foundation](#), was great fun. If you missed that, the official [book launch](#) is scheduled for September 24th at [Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden](#). It is free but please [register](#) if you intend to come.

## How it began

The idea for a book came from my horticulture outreach work at [Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden](#). As Hotline Lady – otherwise known as "Miss Information," thank you, Tim – people asked me many excellent questions on gardening with native plants. At that time, I was fairly new to California native plants, so I had questions of my own. I discussed horticultural practices with the amazing garden staff and volunteers at Rancho. From these discussions, I wrote up information sheets, articles, and website content that were shared with the public. This formed the basis of my knowledge of gardening with natives used in *Wild Suburbia*. However, as others before me have stated, any mistakes in the book are mine and mine alone!

## How it got done

In late 2012 my husband, daughter and I traveled to [India](#) for an extended stay. We spent two months in Mumbai, two months traveling, and the final two months in Bangalore. My husband was on a sabbatical leave visiting scientific institutions in Mumbai and Bangalore. My daughter spent a month on [Navdanya Biodiversity Conservation Farm](#). While not traveling, I had a lot of time on my hands and needed a project, hence, the book. (Photos of most of our time in India – I never uploaded the final few destinations – can be found at the following links: [Mumbai](#), [Elora/Ajunta Caves](#), [Bangalore](#), [Uttaranchal](#), [Shimla](#), [Jaipur](#), [Jodhpur](#), [Jaisalmer](#), [Darjeeling/Gangtok](#), [Assam/Kaziranga](#), [Bangalore](#).)

## What it is

Though seeing these pictures again makes me all dreamy about India, I sat down today to write about [Wild Suburbia](#). (Puzzle of the moment: *Why do I pine for India now, yet while in India, I was pining for home?*)

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All About Gardening with California Native Plants

<http://www.weedingwildsuburbia.com>

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Okay now! The book was intended for beginning gardeners, at least those with little experience with native plants. If you fit into this category, please understand that I wanted to write something that would:

- Tell you how (and why) to create a garden that is in sync with your location.
- Provide common sense approaches with pros and cons.
- Give a small list of native plants that are likely to succeed in most gardens.
- Present gardening as a process, not a final product. Include pictures of new, young and older gardens.
- Convince you that summer brown (or gray) is beautiful.
- Give you the courage to try, fail, and try again.
- Provide advice based on years of experience making mistakes in my own garden.

Gardening is a life-style choice. It should make us happy, provide solace and comfort, and help us come to terms with the great environmental challenges we face. By this I do not mean to suggest that a native garden will cure global climate change and the great extinction of species. No, but it is a small step in the right direction when we decide that our cities should provide habitat for animals that lived here before us and may eke out a living among us.

## **What it includes**

### **Step-by-Step How-to**

The book is a step-by-step guide to converting a traditional lawn-dominated yard into a wilder and hopefully more sustainable garden. It includes tips on figuring out what may have lived here before, what conditions the new plants will find themselves in, and how to begin creating a garden plan. Following this, there is information on how to remove the lawn, select healthy plants, and plant them correctly. Finally, there are tips for keeping these tender young things alive.

The book includes lots of tables and lists. There are pictures, especially of my home garden, showing the plants in landscape settings, and how they develop over time.

### **The Plants**

I also describe 20 California native plants that generally do well in garden conditions. I know that some experienced gardeners get bored with the same list of plants, but for the novice, the newness, number and confusing array of cultivars is overwhelming. I hope that this short list will help those people get started.

### **Garden Interludes**

And finally, I include short essays, called Garden Interludes, that describe the transformation of my own yard. I begin with the early days of my garden, when the city cited me for planting natives in

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the parkway, and move on to the present, a Wild Suburbia that is alive with birds, lizards, butterflies, fig beetles and grandchildren.

### Resources

The appendices in the back of the book include lists of plants for special conditions, where to see natives, where to get them, and resources on gardening with natives.

If you are interested in gardening with native plants but feel a bit lost, you are the person that I am addressing in [Wild Suburbia - Learning to Garden with Native Plants](#). For those who live in California, I will be giving talks and signing books throughout much of the state (from Berkeley on down to San Diego County). You can find a list of these events on the [Upcoming Events](#) page of my website, and on [Heyday Books](#) website.