

Some Native Plants for the Alhambra Creek Watershed*



Native plants in your garden can be a source of **beauty**, provide important sources of **food and shelter for wildlife**; help **reduce erosion**, especially at streamside; **reduce or eliminate the need for irrigation and pesticides**; contribute to a **clean and plentiful water supply**; and help **preserve biodiversity**. This list will help you determine plants suitable to your location – many thrive in moister/shadier creekside areas, and some in drier/sunnier upland areas. Most of these species are drought tolerant if planted in the appropriate location, but will need summer water for the first one or two years until established. For further information about how to care for native plants, and sources of native plants and seeds, see bottom of page 3.

***Goal 8** of *The Alhambra Creek Watershed Management Plan* (April 2001) recommends use of native plants in home gardens, and their protection in existing areas. For more information about the Plan or anything on this flyer, contact the Alhambra Watershed Council at 925-672-6522 x110 or visit our website at www.ccrdc.org.

Trees

Arroyo Willow *Salix lasiolepis*. This small deciduous tree or shrub takes root quickly and provides excellent stream bank stabilization and bird habitat. Willows tolerate full or part sun, sandy soil, and seasonal flooding.

Big-leaf Maple *Acer macrophyllum*. Large, fast-growing, deciduous streamside trees, they need some summer water and can take both sun and shade. Clusters of pale yellow flowers and winged seeds provide food for birds and forage for various rodents.

Blue Elderberry *Sambucus mexicana*. A deciduous multi-trunked tree or large shrub typical of coastal range canyon bottoms, it will thrive in sun to part shade. It is somewhat drought tolerant, but will also thrive when watered. Nectar-rich bunches of creamy white flowers burst forth from April to August, exuding a strong scent in the early evening. By late summer powdery blue bunches of berries arrive, to the delight of many birds.

California Bay *Umbellularia californica*. A large, fast-growing evergreen tree that often bears multiple trunks along and over waterways, its fragrant leaves can be used as seasoning like its more commonly used European counterpart.

California Buckeye *Aesculus californica*. A deciduous tree graced by large spikes of creamy, scented flowers in spring, it goes dormant and loses its leaves in the dry summer, giving way to a striking bare-branched silhouette studded with shiny, golf-ball sized seeds. It tolerates part shade to full sun.

Coast Live Oak *Quercus agrifolia*. A “keystone” species that provides an extremely important source of wildlife food and habitat, this large, familiar evergreen tree will grow to 75’ tall, with an even wider crown-spread. It thrives in full sun to part shade, preferring well-drained soil.

Fremont Cottonwood *Populus fremontii*. A shade-loving, fast-growing deciduous tree that is an important resource for birds and butterflies.

Pacific Madrone *Arbutus menziesii*. With its smooth-skinned reddish-gold bark and shiny green leaves, this elegant tree sports clusters of small, pink bell-shaped flowers, and orange-red berries in the fall – both sources of delectation for birds and other insects. Plant it in sun with some high shade. Its spreading roots provide good erosion control.

Western Sycamore *Platanus racemosa*. Also found along streambanks, this large tree sports distinctive mottled bark, maple-like leaves, and spiny round fruits. Hummingbirds and butterflies love it.

Shrubs

For shadier/moister areas closer to the creek:

California Blackberry *Rubus ursinus*. This trailing shrub can often be found among dense thickets of its invasive, non-native cousin, Himalayan blackberry. Though similar-looking, the native species differs in having soft, furry prickles rather than thorns. It provides good groundcover and stabilizes slopes in shaded areas.

California Rose *Rosa californica*. One of several wild roses found in California, this deciduous species thrives in shade or part shade, and is thorny like its cousins. It will send up shoots from underground roots, forming large hedges that provide wildlife shelter. Its small pink flowers bloom through summer, exuding a faint perfume and, in the fall, yield red “hips” or fruit coveted by birds and other animals.

Black Twinberry *Lonicera involucrata* var. *ledebourii*. A large deciduous shrub, it sports orange-red flowers on long spreading branches. Hummingbirds enjoy the flowers, which give way to black berries. In the fall its handsome dark green foliage changes color. Often found at streamside, it tolerates seasonal flooding, and takes part or full sun.

Coffee Berry *Rhamnus californica* ssp. *californica*. A tough, handsome evergreen shrub with erect branches. It grows quickly and maintains a graceful shape in the garden without pruning, to form a hedge if desired. An adaptable plant, it will take sun to part shade. Birds eat the ripe black berries and insects attracted to the plant, while deer tend to prefer other forage.

Creambush/Ocean Spray *Holodiscus discolor*. A deciduous shrub with large sprays of fragrant white flowers in the summer, it is an adaptable shrub that tolerates part-shade to full sun and drought. Birds feed on the many insects attracted to this shrub, which also attracts butterflies and hummingbirds, although deer do not like it.

Figwort/California Bee Plant. *Scrophularia californica* ssp. *californica*. A medium-sized perennial, this drought-tolerant shrub bears 3' spikes of dark red flowers loved by native bees. It tolerates part sun and different soil types.

Hillside Gooseberry. *Ribes californicum* var. *californicum*. One of four species of gooseberry and currant in the watershed, it is thorny like its cousins, but its purplish-white flowers that bloom in early spring are quite attractive to both humans and hummingbirds. Birds also enjoy the berries that follow. This species thrives in part shade with moderate water.

Red Osier (Red-twig) Dogwood *Cornus sericea* ssp. *occidentalis*. Noted for their yellow-orange to red-purple fall foliage and red winter stems, this species is a large, fast-growing, multi-stemmed shrub that thrives at streamside. Clusters of white flowers appear in late spring, giving way to small white berries enjoyed by birds in the summer.

Snowberry *Symphocarpus albus* var. *laevigatus*. A deciduous shrub that tends to form small thickets. Bees like the flowers, but its bitter white berries don't attract much attention from birds, making it an attractive landscaping plant. It tolerates part sun to full shade, some summer water. Hummingbirds sip nectar from its small pinkish flowers. With a deep root system, it is a good choice to stabilize streambanks.

For sunnier/dryer/upland areas

Black Sage *Salvia mellifera*. An aromatic fast-growing member of the mint family, this shrub has textured, oblong leaves and small whitish purple flowers that butterflies love. The seeds are used by birds and small mammals. It likes sun but will tolerate some shade, different soil types, and deer predation.

Silver Bush Lupine *Lupinus albifrons* var. *albifrons*. A small to medium-sized perennial boasting showy spikes of blue flowers framed by distinctive silver foliage. Butterflies like it, but deer don't. It needs full sun and good drainage. Like all lupine species (or for that matter, all species in the pea family) their roots enrich the soil by "fixing" nitrogen.

Brittle-leaf Manzanita *Arctostaphylos tomentosa* ssp. *crustacea*. With its gray foliage and distinctive smooth, red bark, this local member of a large, drought-tolerant group of plants in California likes sunny spots with good drainage, and soil on the acid side. The clusters of pinkish urn-shaped flowers attract native bees, its red-brown berries are eaten by birds, and its evergreen foliage provides good nesting spots for birds like California quail and wrentits.

California Sagebrush *Artemisia californica*. Various chemicals give this common shrub a characteristic scent that often attracts humans, but repels predators. Though different than culinary sage, its finely divided gray leaves can be used to season food. Drought-tolerant in full sun, and tolerant of varying soil types.

Coast Silk Tassel *Garrya elliptica*. Named for its gray-green flowers that hang like tassels from branch ends in winter (Jan.-Feb.), the male shrub (or small tree) has a showier inflorescence, while the female tree develops clusters of black-purple fruit. Flowers mature to cotton-puff like seeds. It likes full sun to part-shade and moist soil with good drainage.

Mountain Mahogany *Cercocarpus betuloides* var. *betuloides*. A large evergreen shrub, it has a graceful open shape and makes a splashy show in late summer-fall with feathery flowers and fruits that give it a silvery hue. It enriches the soil with its nitrogen-fixing roots, and provides good erosion control and forage for wildlife (including deer).

Sticky Monkeyflower *Mimulus aurantiacus*. This very common drought-tolerant small shrub boasts showy two-lipped orange tubular flowers that bloom over long periods in sunny locations. They attract hummingbirds and are the larval food plant for the buckeye and checkerspot butterflies.

Toyon *Heteromeles arbutifolia*. Not to be confused with Cotoneaster, a similar-looking invasive alien species, Toyon is a drought-tolerant evergreen shrub to small tree bearing handsome toothed leaves, white flowers in summer, and striking red berries in winter. Birds like the berries, but deer are not especially fond of it. It tolerates full to part sun and many soil types, providing excellent erosion control.

Vines

California Wild Grape *Vitis californica*. A fast-growing deciduous vine that will climb and adorn trees or structures, or provide groundcover that turns beautiful shades of yellow and red in the fall. Typically growing along streams or in seeps, it bears clusters of small edible grapes. Bees love its flowers. It likes sun or part-sun, and regular moisture.

Dutchman's Pipe *Aristolochia californica*. With its unusual purplish, pipe-shaped flowers, and heart-shaped leaves that emerge after the flowers, this deciduous vine is a treat to see climbing up trees or walls. As the sole food source for the larvae of the pipevine swallowtail butterfly, it becomes home to fuzzy caterpillars later in the season. Plant it in part shade near creekside or some other reliable source of water.

Hairyvine Honeysuckle *Lonicera hispidula* var. *vacillans*. An adaptable deciduous vine that grows in full sun to full shade and can take both drought and seasonal flooding. It's a good bank filler or groundcover. Hummingbirds like the large pink flowers, birds like its red berries, but deer don't seem to relish it.

Virgin's Bower *Clematis ligusticifolia*. A vine that dies back over the winter (and can be cut back to the woody part of the stem if a neat look is desired), it can unspool many feet during the growing season, climbing anything nearby. It tolerates full or part sun and seasonal flooding. Large, white star-shaped flowers adorn the vine, their protruding stamens or pistils giving them a pincushion effect. In the fall the pistils transform into delicate twisted strands to form a cloud-like swirl. Its similar-looking cousin *C. lasiantha* does better in drier areas.

Grasses, groundcovers and a fern

California Fescue *Festuca californica*. A tough, fairly adaptable bunchgrass that prefers part shade, but will take full sun as well. Growing in large clumps of 3-4', with gracefully drooping stalks, this grass can provide excellent erosion control on slopes or open areas.

California Fuschia *Epilobium canum* ssp. *canum*. With its abundant red trumpet-shaped flowers in the late summer and fall, this plant provides an important nectar source for hummingbirds at a time when many summer blooms are exhausted. This low-growing variety with gray-green foliage serves as a hardy drought-resistant ground cover that spreads rapidly through deep underground rootstocks. It likes sun and well-drained soil, but will tolerate clay.

Melic Grass *Melica torreyana*. There are many perennial bunchgrasses native to the watershed, but this drought tolerant grass is particularly adaptable, growing to 1½ feet under dense canopies or in full sun.

Mugwort *Artemisia douglasiana*. An aggressive deciduous herb with a strong sage-like odor. It will cover stream banks, ditches, or other disturbed areas. Drought tolerant, it also takes seasonal flooding. It will tolerate some sun, and deer. May be invasive.

Western Sword Fern *Polystichum munitum*. Relatively adaptable, this handsome fern with three-foot or longer fronds can grow in part sun to full shade and requires no summer water.

Yerba Buena *Satureja douglasii*. A beautifully scented, evergreen groundcover that creeps over the ground, rather than through spreading roots. Usually found in the shade of oaks, bays and madrones, it likes moisture and will tolerate some sun and all soil types. Its leaves can be used to make a refreshing tea.

Some pretty, easy to grow flowers

Blue-eyed Grass *Sisyrinchium bellum*. A hardy perennial in the iris family with its typically blade-shaped leaves, the plant is extremely adaptable, thriving in sun, sand or clay soils, wetter or drier conditions. The plant spreads into colonies through creeping rootstocks. One-inch blue flowers emerge in profusion at the end of blade and endure for long periods, usually between January and June.

California Buckwheat *Eriogonum fasciculatum*. With more than 100 species in California, the buckwheat genus (only distantly related to the grain buckwheat) is found in a wide range of plant communities. This drought tolerant species likes full sun. It possesses whitish-pink inflorescence with somewhat unusual bright green, needle-like leaves. Buckwehats are very important butterfly plants, and the flowers, leaves and seeds are used by many small animals.

California Goldenrod *Solidago californica*. A fast-growing drought-tolerant perennial with heavily adorned yellow flowering stalks that shoot up to 3 feet high, this plant offers wonderful late summer color. It grows naturally in open places, and will attract all sorts of insects and birds. It will spread vigorously through creeping rootstocks.

Chinese Houses *Collinsia heterophylla*. A showy annual with a one-foot spike of pale purple flowers, named for its resemblance to a Chinese pagoda, it likes shady places, but can take some sun. It reseeds well.

Coyote Mint *Monardella villosa*. This fragrant-leaved perennial will thrive in part shade to sun, though only a sunny exposure will attract butterflies to its purplish-white flowers that bloom in the mid-late summer. Deer proof and drought tolerant, it will become leggy if watered too much.

Golden Monkey Flower *Mimulus guttatus*. This deciduous perennial grows in seeps, springs or along creeks, sporting long-lasting yellow flowers throughout spring-summer. Enjoyed by hummingbirds, disliked by deer. Will take full or part sun, but dies without water.

Narrow-leaf Mule's Ear *Wyethia angustifolia*. A one-foot perennial with 3" yellow blossoms similar to sunflowers, graced by 1-2' long green leaves. It dies back each winter. It tolerates full to part sun and deer.

Red Columbine *Aquilegia Formosa*. This delicate perennial with elegant red blossoms evocative of eagle talons likes full to part sun and a streamside or otherwise moist location. It will lose its leaves without sufficient water. For a neat look prune flower stalks to the ground once a year in early spring. Columbines attract hummingbirds, and are deer proof in many areas.

Scarlet Monkey Flower *Mimulus cardinalis*. A showy perennial to 3' with enduring (most of the year) tubular red flowers that attract hummingbirds. It takes sun to full shade and regular water. A great choice for large areas where it will reseed aggressively.

Showy Milkweed *Asclepias speciosa*. One of three milkweed species in the watershed, this showy, deciduous plant has 5" grayish, fuzzy leaves and large flower clusters. It can form large 3' high clumps through spreading rhizomes. Drought tolerant and sun-loving, milkweed is the sole host for the monarch butterfly, which flock to the plant in the summer.

Additional information

For further information about gardening with native plants, native plant gardens to visit, a bibliography of gardening books, as well as sources for plants and seeds, consult *California Native Plants for the Garden* (2005, C. Bornstein, et al). Resources for native plants can also be found at the East Bay chapter of the California Native Plant Society website at <http://www.ebcnps.org/>. You can find pictures of plants and horticultural info. online at the Las Pilitas Nursery website* www.laspilitas.com. For a list of sources for native plants in northern California, see the Bay Nature magazine website at www.baynature.com/2003/janmarch/resources_2003janmarch.html. *Important note:* if you live by a creek, or open space, the best way to conserve the unique flora of your area and maintain biodiversity is to obtain cuttings or seeds from native plants in your area. This requires a permit on public land.

*Sources consulted for pp. 1-3, along with Friends of Five Creeks "Native Creekside Plants for the East Bay" www.fivecreeks.org

**Sources consulted for p. 4: Bossard, C., J. Randall and M. Hoshovsky, *Invasive Plants of California Wildlands* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 2000); The California Environmental Resources Evaluation System www.ceres.ca.gov/tadn/; Friends of Five Creeks, "Invasive Plants along East Bay Creeks;" "Invasives on the Web," The Nature Conservancy, <http://tncweeds.ucdavis.edu>, Weed Research and Information Center <http://wric.ucdavis.edu/yst/intro/introduction.html>

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Non-native Invasive Plant Species along Creeks in Alhambra Creek Watershed**



Plants from elsewhere have been long been introduced, either accidentally or intentionally, into the watershed. Though they may have seemed initially useful, or beautiful to look at in gardens, some exotics can also cause huge ecological problems and be costly to eradicate. Lacking predators or other controlling factors found in their native habitat, exotics can invade areas and displace native species, often forming an impoverished monoculture that does not support wildlife well. In addition, they can create or worsen erosion and alter habitat in other negative ways. Some of these plants are commonly sold at nurseries; avoid buying them. Clear existing alien species and replant with natives to encourage wildlife and improve ecological health. Before clearing a large stand, take measures to prevent erosion. Large-scale clearing along creek banks requires a permit from the California Department of Fish and Game. If required, heavy equipment and/or chemicals should be used with care, especially in sensitive streamside areas. Selected exotics listed below are particular problems along or near the creek and its tributaries. **See bottom of p. 3 for sources of flyer information.

Non-native invasive plant species commonly sold in nurseries (DO NOT BUY OR PLANT!)

English Ivy *Hedera helix*. Brought to North America by colonial settlers, English ivy is a common landscaping plant, with its hardy evergreen foliage characterized by shiny, dark-green, three-pointed leaves. But it has also spread into uncultivated areas, covering the ground and climbing up trees by rooting at leaf nodes along the stem. It is the most common invasive plant, with Periwinkle, along Alhambra Creek. It shades out other plants, suppresses tree growth, and reduces forage and habitat for wildlife. Remove the extensive root system by hand. Pieces of ivy left on the ground will reroot. On trees, cut the vine at waist height and pull it off bark as far up the tree as possible. Cape or German ivy *Senecio mikanooides* is even more invasive than English ivy, spreading rapidly from seeds or fragments of leaves or stems, and eventually shading out other plants. In contrast to English ivy, its stems do not become woody; its leaves are brighter green with more rounded leaf points; and young stems are bright pink. Remove all parts of plant and roots, seal in a bag, and dispose of in trash. Monitor and remove any regrowth.

Pampas Grass and Jubata Grass. *Cortaderia selloana, jubata*. Originally from South America, these grasses were introduced to California as ornamentals, and the larger Pampas Grass was later used for forage and erosion control in southern California. The tall grasses with their dramatic white seed plumes crowd out native vegetation without providing food for wildlife, and buildup of their dry leaf bases cause fire hazards. Reproduction occurs through seed, with Jubata Grass requiring no pollination for its prolific seed production (one million or more seeds per clump). Both species may also reproduce vegetatively from fragmented tillers. To remove, hand pull seedlings. Use a shovel or mattock to remove established clumps, making sure to remove entire crown and top section of roots. If flowers are present, remove first to prevent seed dispersal.

Periwinkle *Vinca major*. An evergreen vine bearing purple flowers and shiny, dark-green leaves, periwinkle was introduced from southern Europe and northern Africa for ornamental and medical purposes. Along with English ivy, it is the most common invasive along Alhambra Creek. Still planted widely in home gardens, it escapes and spreads quickly as its stems reroot at the tips. Shade-loving, it forms a dense carpet in drainage areas or where cover is dense. Water transports stem fragments that then root throughout riparian areas. Periwinkle displaces native plants and lowers species diversity. Remove entire plant manually beginning at the perimeter of a patch, moving inward, and periodically repeat throughout the growing (wet) season.

A few other notable non-native invasive plant species (Remove whenever possible!)

Giant Reed *Arundo donax*. Originally from Eurasia, *Arundo* has been cultivated in this country for roofing material, fodder, musical instruments, erosion control and horticulture. A tall, perennial, bamboo-like grass that grows along stream banks and other wet areas, it forms large, continuous root masses, creating clumps with hundreds of stems that can grow rapidly to heights of up to 25 feet, choking out and killing everything in its path. It reproduces when pieces of stem break off and take root elsewhere, and through underground rhizomes. *Arundo* consumes 3 times more water than native plants; can take over a stream channel, causing a flood and fire hazard; and its shallow root system can lead to stream bank failure. To remove, hand pull if under 6' high, removing all rhizome material. Mechanical and chemical methods must be used for large infestations.

Himalayan Blackberry *Rubus discolor*. Probably introduced from western Europe to North America as a cultivated crop, this shrub has showy pinkish flowers and berries relished by humans and birds. Distinguished from the native blackberry by its prickly rather than furry thorns, it spreads rapidly through a variety of asexual reproductive methods. Where cane tips hit soil they will root, and seeds spread to new areas through water transport and animal droppings. The shrub creates large impenetrable banks that prevents growth of other vegetation. Although providing food and shelter for wildlife, it can also prevent larger mammals from reaching water sources, is a hazard for livestock, and reduces pasture area and access for humans. Though its thorns and dense underground root system make it difficult, the best removal method is to dig out the entire rootstock to prevent regrowth.

Yellow Starthistle *Centaurea solstitialis*. Originally introduced to California as a seed contaminant in Chilean-grown alfalfa during the Gold Rush, yellow starthistle has now spread over 15 million acres, and in 56 of 58 counties. It has a long flowering season, and one plant produces up to 75,000 seeds that can remain viable for 10 years. Road maintenance equipment and vehicles are primary modes of spread into new areas. It displaces native plants, devastates rangelands, significantly depletes soil moisture, and may cause serious disease or death in horses.