

CALIFORNIA DROUGHT



Photo by Robert Casillas/LANG Staff Photographer

Native plants fill the landscape at the White Point Nature Education Center in San Pedro. The Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy notes that native plants provide benefits, such as helping control erosion, eliminating the need for pesticides and fertilizers, reducing water bills and protecting property from wildfires.

Interest in native plants surges as drought concern heightens

By Ashley Ratcliff
Special to the News

With the lack of significant rainfall and the constant reminder of that fact, we Californians can grow immune to the news of an imminent drought. However, one website — CADrought.com — is providing an expansive look at the climate concern in a way that informs and inspires change.

It's clear that the solution starts in our own backyards.

"We're going to have to live with our new

reality," Kathleen Norris Brenzel, garden editor at *Sunset* magazine and editor of the latest edition of *The Sunset Western Garden Book of Landscaping*, told CADrought.com. "Droughts are gonna keep coming. So we might as well change our mindset and even have some fun with what we can do. The key to a beautiful garden is not just the plants you buy, but how you put them together to make them sing."

Andrea Vona, executive director of the

NATIVE PLANTS

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Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy, has noticed an increase in the number of succulents, drought-tolerant plants and mulch being used in neighborhoods on the Hill.

“I think it’s at the forefront of people’s minds currently, and it’s something people can do in their own home to help ... and impart change, and make a difference,” she said. “I think more and more people are becoming aware of how important water conservation is today.”



Photo by Robert Casillas

Native plants can be beneficial and beautiful.

According to Vona, the Environmental Protection Agency has determined that landscape irrigation accounts for about 30 percent or more of all residential water use, and about half of outdoor water is wasted because of inefficient watering methods.

The conservancy notes that native plants provide benefits, such as helping control erosion, eliminating the need for pesticides and fertilizers, reducing water bills and protecting property from wildfires.

Vona practices what she preaches by adorning her San Pedro home with an array of native plants. Several years ago she removed the grass from her front lawn and planted California native and drought-tolerant plants, and has since enjoyed the increased biodiversity around her abode.

"It has led to significant reduction in watering needed for the plants," Vona said. "I have hummingbirds, and lots of butterflies and lizards. [My yard is] fairly small but it provides visual interest, and I also think it's beneficial to the native insects, birds and other critters that depend on these plants for food and shelter. It's fun for me and my two sons to be able to see the birds and the butterflies coming to visit in our front yard."

A diverse array of native plants caters to residents' spatial needs and aesthetic preferences. Cactus is becoming a popular choice for some parts of gardens, Vona said. For coverage of large slopes, lemonadeberry is a common preference, while the sticky monkeyflower is often used to enhance smaller gardens.

"People also really like the annual flowers — poppies and lupines — to bloom in the spring time," Vona added.

Native Plant Nursery to the defense

The PVPLC is in the business of beautifying and restoring the open space in the area, completing 5 acres of restoration per year across all the land it manages. It has recently completed work to portions of the 1,400-acre Palos Verdes Nature Preserve and 21 acres at Three Sisters Reserve. The conservancy will plant 5 acres of native plants at the Portuguese Bend Reserve this fall and is restoring the bluff habitat at Abalone Cove Reserve.

To outfit the land with native plant species — some serve as food plants for the endangered Palos Verdes blue butterfly, others as plants for habitat restoration projects that support other local species — the conservancy has utilized the Native Plant Nursery at the Defense Fuel Support Point in San Pedro, where its staff and volunteers grow more than 45 varieties of native plants.

Fall is the best time to plant native plants, according to Vona. Thankfully, there are many outlets for residents to acquire the drought-tolerant flora through multiple local sales.

The private Native Plant Nursery produces plants for sale to the public at other locations, such as White Point Preserve every fourth Saturday of the month from noon to 2 p.m. For October only, the sale will move to Abalone Cove Reserve in celebration of the property's grand reopening Oct. 25

from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The South Coast branch of the California Native Plant Society will host a native plant sale Oct. 3 from 5 to 7 p.m. for PVPLC; Native Plant Society and Friends of Madrona Marsh members at the Madrona Marsh Nature Center. The sale opens to the public Oct. 4 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Generally, native plants require some pruning, but otherwise little maintenance. The conservancy has offered classes to residents on the upkeep of these drought-resistant plants, including Coastal Sage Scrub 101 and composting talks at White Point, among others.

Vona emphasized that once plants establish a deep root system over time they're relatively maintenance-free, but it takes about a year to get them ready.

"We talk a lot about native plants and being drought tolerant or drought resistant, but I think it is important to keep in mind that really all plants do require some water or supply of moisture to get established. Once they're established, they're drought tolerant or drought resistant."

CA drought.com is a website sponsored by the Los Angeles News Group, the PV News' parent company. Readers can find statewide news about the drought as well as tips for water conservation.

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