

the dirt



SPRING 2021 GARDENING NEWSLETTER

Edible gardens.

Homegrown selections for your yard.

Edible gardens have been making a comeback as people spend more time at home. Relish the joy of harvesting your own delicious peppers, squash, or tomatoes. Ditch the desperate search through the spice rack and cut sprigs of fresh herbs just outside your kitchen door instead.

Edible gardens can be relaxing, provide great family time and give you delicious fruits, vegetables, and herbs. And did you know that many California native plants are edible?

Getting started is easy, and with drip irrigation edible gardens can be a smart way to use your water. The secret to success is knowing the crops you're hoping to harvest. Various plants grow best at different times of year.

In terms of edible native plants, there are many you can use to enhance your garden and your culinary skills:

- **Big saltbush** (*Atriplex lentiformis*) – produces salty leaves great for potato tacos or baked lasagna.
- **Cleveland sage** (*Salvia clevelandii*) – perfect for everyday seasoning, but also for pesto, ice cream, or even to flavor your own beer.

- **Huckleberry** (*Vaccinium ovatum*) – easier to grow in our climate than its famous relative, the blueberry, and just as delicious.
- **Oreganillo** (*Aloysia wrightii*) – sometimes called Wright's beebush, it is a desert oregano with a hint of citrus, perfect for seasoning frijoles, potatoes, and other dishes.



Huckleberry

Cleveland sage

As with anything you eat, use caution when selecting native plants for food. For more information, visit the California Native Plant Society website at CNPS.org or OC Master Gardener at mgorange.ucanr.edu.

California native gardening is for the birds.

Trude Hurd | Project Director of Education, Sea & Sage Audubon Society

After dedicating nearly 29 years to Sea & Sage Audubon Society, Hurd's understanding of the role of natural habitat in wild bird survival only deepens. Her contagious enthusiasm infuses how Hurd and her volunteer staff engage visitors at IRWD's San Joaquin Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary.



IRWD: Why did you start planting California natives?

Hurd: Ten years ago, I bought my first house and wanted to attract more birds and pollinators to my neighborhood. First, I did a lot of planning, then began with the curbside area, replacing the grass there with natives. Gradually, my entire landscape went native.

IRWD: How does planting natives help birds and insects?

Hurd: Studies have been done comparing non-native oaks versus native oaks in their ability to support indigenous

birds. The native oaks won, hands down, in sustaining insects and birds. Even seed-eating birds will catch insects to feed to their chicks. Fledglings need protein to grow and insects are loaded with protein.

IRWD: Is planting natives something most Orange County folks can do?

Hurd: Yes! To get started just choose a part of your lawn, like curbside, a side yard section, or even a container planter. Include a buffer area between your natives and where you're watering other plant types. Most natives survive with no water in summer, yet can tolerate heavy rain in cold weather. You don't need any fertilizers. They will do fine in clay: just break up the clay so their roots can get started. Be patient. It takes two to three years for natives to get established. Then they take off and grow like crazy.

IRWD: More inspiring reasons to plant natives?

Hurd: North American bird populations have decreased over the last 50 years. Anything we can do to provide suitable habitat will help their numbers increase. The natural beauty of the changing seasons in Orange County is displayed by natives, if we just take the time to plant them—and watch and enjoy!

Removing invasive plants.

A guide to avoiding aggressive non-natives.

Many plants commonly available in local nurseries do not play nice in the garden. Understanding the difference between native plants, non-native plants, and invasive plants is critical to deciding what to add to your landscape.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, native plants are those that have developed in a region or ecosystem over hundreds or thousands of years. Non-native plants are usually introduced by humans to a new place where they were not previously found. Invasive plants are both non-native and grow or spread quickly to the point of disrupting plant communities or ecosystems, preventing germination of native plants and potentially increasing the frequency of fires in chaparral and coastal sage scrub.

To ensure you do not inadvertently plant invasive plants in your landscape, visit the California Invasive Plant Council and PlantRight websites for a list of invasive plants. Visit the California Native Plant Society website to learn about the plants that are native to your climate zone or download the free planting guide, a curated list of easy-to-find California native plants.



Check before you plant:

Invasive species can quickly overrun your garden

Helpful resources:

California Invasive Plant Council

Cal-IPC.org

PlantRight

PlantRight.org

California Native Plant Society

CNPS.org



Juan's tip of the season.

Reduce sprinklers' water pressure for better performance

High water pressure not only creates more wear and tear on a sprinkler's inner and outer components, it also wastes water with inefficiencies such as excess flow, misting, fogging and uneven coverage.

Sprinkler bodies with built-in pressure-regulating features can compensate for high inlet pressure. IRWD's Pressure Regulating Spray Body Program provides incentives for EPA WaterSense approved pressure regulating spray sprinkler bodies that address these problems. The program is available to commercial, public agency, and residential customers at RightScope.com/rebates.

Looking ahead.

Spring garden to-do list

- **Healthy soils:** Mulch, mulch, mulch! Plants and soils benefit by retaining soil moisture and helping to control weeds. Healthy soils contain beneficial organisms that help aerate soils.
- **Maintenance:** California native plants require different amounts of water, sun, soil conditions, and care throughout the season. Pair your plants with their appropriate needs.
- **Composting:** The traditional method involves making a pile of organic materials and letting it stand for a year. It is ready when it has a pleasant, earthy aroma, a dark brown color, and a crumbly texture.

Learn at our webinars



April 14 | Noon | Plants for the Planet. Select the right plants for your landscape. We'll discuss California natives, seasonal water needs, and horticultural care tips.

May 12 | Noon | Sprinkler Spruce-up. Learn how to save money and water by repairing and maintaining your irrigation system. Find out the easy way to update sprinklers to drip irrigation.

Sign up at RightScope.com/events.

Tap RightScope resources

Visit RightScope.com for rebates to help offset the cost of turf removal, weather-based irrigation controllers, efficient sprinkler heads, drip kits and more. Plus, check out our plant database at RightScopeResources.com.

About The Dirt

The Dirt is a quarterly gardening resource from Irvine Ranch Water District, created to help you grow a more beautiful, water-efficient garden. Each newsletter brings you seasonal tips to keep plants thriving all year long.

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