



Enjoying the Outdoors, Indoors

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Project for my Gold Award

NATIVE PLANTS

Native plants are species that have grown in Pasadena for thousands of years before people built houses and roads, so they're perfectly suited to our hot, dry summers and cool, wet winters. Because they're used to this climate, they need much less extra water than plants from far away and can survive droughts more easily. These plants also provide food and shelter for local wildlife like bees, butterflies, and birds: for example, bright orange California poppies bloom in spring to feed native bees, and toyon shrubs produce red berries that hungry birds love in winter. Their deep roots help hold the soil in place on our hillsides, and their strong branches and leaves resist pests and diseases common here. By planting natives such as fragrant Cleveland sage or mighty coast live oak trees, we create beautiful gardens that save water, protect our environment, and celebrate the nature that makes Pasadena special.

Pasadena's Mediterranean-style climate and varied topography support a rich palette of drought-tolerant, wildlife-friendly natives. Here are five you'll commonly encounter:

1. Coast Live Oak (*Quercus agrifolia*)

- **Appearance:** Majestic evergreen with a broad, spreading canopy; leathery, lobed leaves that stay glossy year-round.
- **Habitat:** Foothill woodlands and canyon bottoms; often seen lining streets and in local parks.
- **Ecological Role:** Acorns feed birds (jays, woodpeckers) and mammals (squirrels, deer); its canopy shelters understory plants and nesting birds.

2. California Sycamore (*Platanus racemosa*)

- **Appearance:** Deciduous tree up to 80 ft tall; mottled bark peeling to reveal creamy white and olive patches; large maple-like leaves.
- **Habitat:** Riparian corridors and arroyo bottoms—look for them along Eaton Canyon and the Arroyo Seco.
- **Ecological Role:** Provides critical shade and erosion control; seed balls support small mammals, and cavities offer nesting sites for owls and woodpeckers.

3. Toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*) "Christmas Berry"

- **Appearance:** Glossy, dark-green evergreen shrub up to 15 ft; in winter, bears dense clusters of bright red berries.
- **Habitat:** Chaparral slopes and canyon edges; thrives in well-drained soils and sun.
- **Ecological Role:** Berries are a vital winter food source for mockingbirds, cedar waxwings, and other songbirds; dense foliage offers shelter to small mammals.

4. Cleveland Sage (*Salvia clevelandii*)

- **Appearance:** Aromatic, silver-green foliage with spikes of deep violet-blue flowers in spring and early summer.

- **Habitat:** Dry hillsides and coastal sage scrub remnants; often planted in native-landscape gardens.
- **Ecological Role:** A magnet for native bees, hummingbirds, and butterflies; its fragrance deters some garden pests.

5. California Buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*)

- **Appearance:** Low, mounding shrub (1–3 ft) with clusters of tiny white to pink flowers that age to rust-red.
- **Habitat:** Sunny, rocky slopes and chaparral; common along Allendale Canyon Trail.
- **Ecological Role:** Nectar-rich blossoms sustain native bees and butterflies; seeds feed songbirds and small mammals.

Tip for Spotting Them:

Walk local greenbelts like Hahamongna or the Eaton Canyon Nature Center—early morning or late afternoon light brings out these plants’ colors and the wildlife they support.