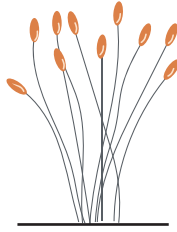


# SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT LIST



Our yard at Urban Renewable HQ has become a test plot for planting Southern California natives. What follows is a list with photos of what we planted in the spring of 2024. The plants are separated into Parkway (north facing), Front Yard (also north facing, with a good deal of afternoon shade), and Back Yard (south facing and sunny).







# PARKWAY NATIVES



## Deergrass

*Muhlenbergia rigens*

*huutah* (Tongva)

Not sure why but this pliant and spiky sphere of native grass delights me. Maybe because it reminds me of Tina Turner's iconic hair style. Tongva and Chumash people use it as a basketry foundation. We use it in our parkway to introduce the street to our native garden beyond. It's low-water and easy to grow — a big plus for new gardeners. Deergrass thrives best in full sun and sandy soil but it's working in our mostly clay soil, too.



## Common Yarrow

*Achillea millefolium*

*steleq' 'a' 'emet or masteleq 'a pistuk,*

**both meaning "tail of the ground squirrel"**

**(Chumash)**

*Yerba Muela* (Spanish)

The Romans named the plant after Achilles, the mythical Greek hero who used it to stop the bleeding in his soldiers' wounds. The Chumash name for it is right on, because the feathered leaves look just like a ground squirrel tail. The Spanish name means "molar tooth," and a poultice made from its leaves is unsurprisingly used for toothaches. As a hippie college student, I made yarrow tea from the dried leaves to help reduce menstrual cramps. The plant is durable, flourishes in a wide range of soil types, and spreads when grown. In our parkway it gets occasionally stomped or peed on, which doesn't make it happy, but it endures. We're getting blackened leaves around the base. I think I overwatered it the first season.

Kwame and Charles plant a Coastal Live Oak in our north-facing parkway. Charles grew the tree from an acorn in a pot on his patio and donated it to our project. The sapling will need stake support to guide a good growth trajectory. All photos: MBS





### **Frogfruits**

*Phyla nodiflora*

This stuff is a fairly tough no-mow evergreen ground cover in the verbena family that can take moderate foot traffic and works great in our parkway. It has waxy leaves and little white flowers that attract pollinators. It spreads out well as a runner and covers ground of its own accord. Instead of a noisy lawn mower and leaf blower, we either snip the runners with clippers or use our shoes to nudge them off the sidewalk.



### **Coastal Live Oak Tree**

*Quercus agrifolia*

*ku'w* (Chumash)

Our oak was grown from an acorn by Charles Miller. The 6-foot sapling is spindly now. But over many decades it will grow to from 20-82-feet tall—and far outlive us. What community and climate transformations will it witness? Charles notes that Coastal Live Oaks are hyper-local and very important to the ecosystem; each supports hundreds of species. He suggests we let the tree do its thing for the first year, meaning especially “Don’t cut the top off its leading branch.” Our Live Oak replaces the Catalpa tree that had been in the parkway for decades but was dying of old age [see “Witness Trees.”]



### **Siskiyou Blue Idaho Fescue**

*Festuca idahoensis*

(parkway and back yard bioswale)

This grows in densely-clumping tufts, with thin silvery-bluish stems ranging from about 12 to 32 inches. We found it hard to get going, but once its root system took hold—nearly 9 months—it started to fill out. I love its sturdy though thin blue-hued stems, and that it’s evergreen. It likes full sun or morning sun and afternoon shade.

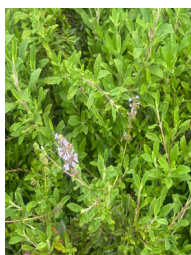




## Velvet Ash tree

*Fraxinus velutina*

For what it's worth, this is one of the only plants we bought from a nursery (in Temecula), and it's the only one that's given us worry. It developed a curl-leaf aphid problem and has definitely not been happy its first year. When its leaves fell in the fall, we collected and threw them in the green waste bin. Leaving them to decompose in place would have allowed the remaining dormant aphids to bust out in spring. We're hoping to tackle Year 2 proactively with soapy water applied to individual leaves. If all goes well, this deciduous tree should grow up to 32 feet tall, offer welcome shade in spring and summer, and be happily free of excess aphids.



## Black Sage

*Salvia mellifera*

*kasili* (Tongva)

This evergreen has a powerful earthy scent and is an important food source for bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds. It can grow up to 6 feet tall and 10 feet wide. We are trying to train it to grow up and not out, so it doesn't grow onto the sidewalk.



## Hummingbird Sage

*Salvia spathacea*

(parkway and front planter)

The smell is heavenly and bees and butterflies love it, too. Tina Calderon, who is in part Gabrielino Tongva and Chumash, says tea made from it is naturally sweet. It's got bold pink and red flowering blossoms, and over time its spreading rhizomes can cover a large area. It grows well in shade and part-shade, so hopefully it will thrive in the shadow of our neighbor's parkway Catalpa tree.





# FRONT-YARD NATIVES



## **De La Mina Verbena**

*Verbena lilacina*

**(front and back yard)**

This is one sassy shrub! An adaptable, mounding evergreen that grows 2-3 feet tall and 3-4 feet wide, it produces delicate green foliage and wonderful purple blossoms that bop in the breeze. Plus, it was still blooming in January and February which basically means it delights with color year round. The other day a bumble bee landed on a blossom and bent its stem like a pole vaulter; it was fabulous. This native doesn't mind clay soil, and both the bees and the butterflies are crazy for it.



## **Low-growing Coyote Bush**

*Baccharis pilularis*

Its short height and spreading habit make it a good choice for ground cover in the yard to fill in gaps. It's also known to be fire resistant and is able to tolerate recycled water. The Chumash consider Coyote Bush the best remedy for poison oak rash. They boil the leaves and apply them to affected body parts. It grows well in most soil types and has vibrant green leaves.



## **California Fuchsia**

*Epilobium canum*

*s' akht' un 'iyukhnuts* = "hummingbirds suck"

**(Chumash)**

**(front and back yard)**

Neighbors ask about the California fuchsia a lot. True, with its riot of bright orange/scarlet flowers in summer and autumn, this perennial is really quite vibrant. Part of its

Red Admiral butterflies love the De La Mina Verbena.

Photo: MBS (plant photos by MBS as well)

stand-out character is due to the fact that it's frequently the only California native flowering at the height of summer. Anna's hummingbirds and Western Honey Bees love it. California Fuchsias love the sun, but in scorching heat they will need a little extra water until their roots grow deep.

One July morning I was in the front yard as a father and his three-year-oldish son walked by. I could hear them before I saw them, since I was crouched low and grumpily focused on extricating the zillionth nutsedge weed from the butcher-paper "weed barrier" beneath the mulch. The boy was excitedly imploring his dad to look at the "cuckoo crazy bird," pointing at an Anna's hummingbird in our garden: "Look how it's sticking its nose in that flower!" he said.

They paused in front of our California Fuchsia, watching the hummingbird dart from one vibrant orange bugle blossom to the next. "It's getting nectar with its beak," the dad said. "What's nectar?" his son asked.

They passed by me so I didn't quite get how his father answered but I loved everything about the exchange I'd overheard.

That boy joy reminded me of my own childhood wonder; how my parents made nature—its wild beauty, mystery, and freedoms—an integral part of our family life. As a kid I absolutely experienced nature's goings on as magic.

I still do, and am always surprised when the feeling isn't universally shared. For example, I once tried to explain to my museum-loving husband the sensual, spiritual, and aesthetic forces that never fail to enfold me in nature. He said art did that for him, plus there were no bugs.

On their return trip homeward, I greeted father and son and said I'd heard them talking about the hummingbird; that it was kind of lovely that the little guy had learned a new word.

The boy exclaimed, "nectar is food for the cuckoo crazy bird!" And the dad said, "It's the kind of memory he's gonna treasure. Me, too."







### **Redflower Buckwheat**

*Eriogonum grande (var. rubescens)*

Its rosy-colored flower clusters rise above low-growing foliage and bloom from spring to fall. The flowers attract a variety of pollinators, especially butterflies and the Sphinx moth. After blooming, just let them go to seed because they provide food for birds. I enjoy rubbing the clusters between my fingers and letting them carpet the ground.



### **Ashleaf Buckwheat**

*Eriogonum cinereum*

**(front and back yard)**

This has light-brownish-pink flower clusters that bloom in all seasons, and is a food plant for the Bernardino dotted blue butterfly. It astounds me that two similar types of buckwheat attract altogether different types of butterflies. It may reach up to more than 4 feet in height and width, with silvery-gray leaves.



### **Margarita BOP Penstemon**

*Penstemon heterophyllus*

**(front and back yard)**

This is a low-growing evergreen perennial with narrow, linear leaves and profuse blooms that start out blue and turn rose-purple. It flowers from spring through summer and Anna's hummingbirds love it.



### **Canyon Sunflower**

*Venegasia carpesioides*

This evergreen shrub in our north-facing front yard has bright yellow blossoms that are nearly always in bloom. It grows up to 6 feet tall and brings sunshiney flashes to a partly shady part of our yard. It's happy there.



## California Sagebrush

*Artemisia californica*

*we'way* (Chumash)

*Pawots* (Tongva)

(front and back yard)

Its silvery-green threadlike foliage is a feast of sage scent (and it kind of bugs me that it's also called "cowboy cologne.") This sagebrush grows between 1-8 feet tall and 4 feet wide and is blessedly tough. It's extremely drought tolerant and will thrive even in nutrient-poor soil if it's well draining. California native birds and insect species love this spindly beauty. The Chumash use a poultice of wet leaves to treat headaches, while the Tongva find it useful in treating respiratory ailments and to reduce fever and pain.



## Common Deerweed

*Acmispon glaber* (var. *glaber*)

At just a year old, we haven't seen them yet but it's said to produce small yellow flowers that turn orange-red as they age, providing essential nectar for native bees and butterflies. Its slender, wispy stems and tiny leaves are delicate. Though we can't quite believe it — they look kind of dainty now — these plants can grow 2-7 feet tall. It's also nitrogen-fixing, which plays a vital role in restoring soil health after wildfires.



## Brittlebrush

*Encelia farinosa*

*Pa.akal* (Tongva)

(front and back yard)

Its silvery-gray-green leaves grow 1-3 inches long, and it boasts yellow daisy flowers that attract butterflies and birds. To relieve chest pains, the Tongva apply heated gum from the plant. Its resin is collected, hardened, and taken as a general pain killer. It can grow 1-5 feet tall and 4 feet wide. Ours have already grown this big in a year! Brittlebrush grows in the Sonoran desert, too, and reminds me of home.





### **Island Snapdragon**

*Gambelia speciosa*  
(front and back yard)

This perennial is low-growing but also kind of vine-like. It has trumpet-shaped red flowers that hummingbirds love. Ours have bloomed all year (except for when I wanted to take this photo!) Alas, we learned the hard way not to try to transplant them in winter. We had to move one for construction reasons in January, but it didn't survive the shock.



### **Celestial Blue Sage**

*Salvia 'Celestial Blue'*

Not that we've seen this yet, but they have unique bluish purple flowers that attract many native hummingbirds and butterflies to the garden. It's a hybrid cross of Cleveland, blue, and purple sage. This part of the front yard was a bit naked so we planted this sage later, in June. It fits in nicely and we can't wait to see it bloom. The shrub averages 3-5 feet and mounds as it grows.



### **Oregon Grape/Dwarf Mahonia**

*Berberis aquifolium (var. repens)*  
*Yatatko (Tongva)*

This is very drought tolerant and easy to grow. The Tongva use it to treat skin problems. A poultice made from roots and bark relieves sores while the stems provide a yellow dye for basketry. It was planted in the space between our downstairs entrance and the stairs that go to the upper flat — a “welcome plant” of sorts. But its leaves are prickly like holly. Not sure it's the right vibe.



### **Western Redbud Tree**

*Cercis occidentalis*  
(bioswale)

This small deciduous tree has thin brown branches, heart-shaped leaves, and sassy bright pink or magenta flowers — we don't know yet — that bloom in spring. Can't wait to see its blossoms against our orange duplex. It can take damp soil so we planted it in the bioswale. Ah, the "bioswale." It's a multi-tasking landscape features similar to rain gardens that collects polluted stormwater runoff, soaks it into the ground, and filters out pollution.



### **Fringed Willowherb**

*Epilobium ciliatum*  
(bioswale)

This perennial herb grows in moist areas but we're not sure we love it. Often, it has a lot of dried and wispy stems with cotton-ball-looking fluff — not super lovely but we don't want to rip it out, either.



### **Beach Strawberry**

*Fragaria chiloensis*  
(planter)

Its dark-green, glossy leaves are on creeping stems that spread quickly and work great as ground cover. It blooms with delicate white flowers in spring and early summer and will later be replaced by red fruits when it matures a bit.



### **Golden Currant**

*Ribes aureum* (var. *aureum*)  
*kochaar* (Tongva)  
(planter and west side of house)

This small-to-medium size deciduous shrub grows 6-10



feet tall in an upright form. It's staked near exterior walls because when it blooms its lovely yellow flowers — attractive to hummingbirds and butterflies — are going to look gorgeous against our orange duplex. The Tongva use it to treat sores: its inner bark is dried, pulverized, and applied to affected areas. To reduce swelling of the leg, a decoction is made of the inner bark and ingested.



### **Fuchsiaflower Gooseberry**

*Ribes speciosum*  
(planter)

This fuchsia flowered gooseberry is a not-friendly looking deciduous shrub — due mostly to the thorns along its branches. But its dark green and glossy leaves are pretty and the tiny fuchsia blossoms are even better. Its flowers attract hummingbirds, butterflies, and moths while birds like eating the berries (which we have yet to see). It prefers shade and seasonally moist locations. We had to transplant it from our back yard when we built our deck but it seems very happy in the front planter.



### **Ajuga Hedge Nettle**

*Stachys ajugoides*  
(planter and east side of house)

This crazy plant exploded in our front planter. It seems to like moist areas, and since our hose bib leaked it was getting a lot of extra water (we also have it planted in a very shaded side area, which it also likes). But the winter Santa Anas did a number on it and we had to remove it — or at least we thought we had. Once we cleared the area, we discovered a bunch of baby shoots growing from the host plant's underground horizontal stem, which means that the storm-whipped plant we took out left behind some wonderful gifts.



Our front yard, about 8 months in. Transplants were placed on right side / west edge of duplex (photo taken prior to transplant operation).

## HOW TO TRANSPLANT

In early March, right around the one-year anniversary of our Southern California native garden, we needed to transplant a California Fuchsia, a Fuchsiaflower Gooseberry, and a De La Mina Verbena to make way for a back-yard deck. A previous transplant attempt on my part had resulted in a very dead Island Snapdragon within days, so I was grateful for wise and gentle help from independent landscape consultant Mario Jose Sanchez (@ezgreenslandscape), who happened to be helping with deck construction.

Mario grew up enjoying and volunteering at the Audubon Center, an environmental education and conservation gem in Northeast L.A.'s Debs Park. After studying physics in college, he returned to volunteering at Audubon and also joined the volunteer group at El Sereño Community Garden. "I didn't have a botany or landscaping education at school," he said. "Most of my knowledge comes from community members. It's a collective knowledge from people I have worked next to in the gardens, watching them, talking to them."

In our garden Mario worked his magic, moving the plants to sparse places with the right sun exposure for each species. He later broke down his transplanting method for me. What follows are tips offered with a generosity of spirit and enthusiasm for sharing knowledge learned from digging with others in the soil.

🪴 Prepare the plant's new place. Make sure it's got the right sun/shade/moisture characteristics. Dig the hole deep enough so that no roots will be exposed.

🪴 Prune lightly before transplanting, especially older plants, so they don't have to pull as much water from the ground when they're moved. The plants will be stressed enough, so make the transition as easy as possible.

🪴 Know the relative size of the plant's root system. It's very important to know the radius so you don't unnecessarily sever roots as you begin to dig. When in doubt, widen the circle around the plant.

🪴 Go slowly. Begin digging with a trowel at the outside of the circle. Be gentle. Find the delicate ends of the roots and kind of massage them to loosen the soil that's sticking to them. Then work inward to loosen the layers of soil around the larger roots to help free and expose them.

🪴 Be patient. You may think the plant is ready, but a lot of roots get damaged at this point because not enough soil has been removed. The extra soil makes the roots heavier and puts unnecessary stress on the plant when it's pulled up.

🪴 Of the three plants, the California Fuchsia was the most challenging because its branches are the most delicate. Before removing it from the soil, it helped to tie a small string around the plant so the branches didn't flop around and risk snapping. It's also easier to transport this way. (The method works for some sage plants, too, especially the California Sagebrush.)

🪴 Place the plant in the prepared spot, cover the roots with soil and tamp it down to get rid of air pockets.

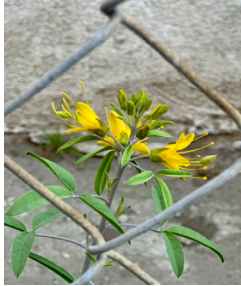
🪴 Build a mini-berm around the plant so that water stays close to the roots, which will be a bit shocked. Cover the bermed area with mulch to hinder evaporation, and water the plant well.

As a general rule, avoid transplanting when it's hot. Mario prefers doing the work at end of fall or going into spring. He thinks our timing for this transplanting operation during the first week of March was "pretty perfect." I'm happy to report that the transplants seem happy in their new digs.





# BACK-YARD NATIVES



## Valley Bladderpod

*Peritoma arborea* var. *globosa*

This plant doesn't smell very good, which is too bad since it's right out our back door. But it's pretty and has a nice way of threading its stems through our cyclone fence. Also, butterflies and moths like it so that's good enough for us. It has delicate yellow flowers and bulbous green pods, and can grow between 2-7 feet tall.



## Chaparral Mallow

*Malacothamnus fasciculatus*

*Khman* (Chumash)

We love this evergreen shrub that looks more like a small tree — let's say it's tree-ish — with small pale pink flowers that grow on branching, elongated clusters. Its bark can be used to make cordage. When it's in full bloom, it can have thousands of flowers. Butterflies, hummingbirds and other small birds love this plant and seem to constantly move about it when it's blooming.



## Fragrant Pitcher Sage

*Lepechinia fragrans*

This one may be our favorite, but that's probably because it's right next to our sitting stump in the back yard and many a morning has been spent breathing in its gorgeous earthy scent and watching the bees and hummingbirds flit about it. It's an evergreen flowering shrub in the Mint family that grows in an upright multi-branched shape, with 'pitcher-shaped' lavender flowers that bees can get inside. Its leaves are plump with fuzzy hairs that make them glow in sunlight like they have an aura. Magical.

Our back-yard moringa trees offer some privacy and camouflage the telephone pole. Our compost is used for our vegetable garden, and solar lanterns create a great evening atmosphere. Photos: MBS

and we've already seen little shoots of it elsewhere in the garden. But be warned: once it loses its leaves it looks like a bunch of skinny lonely twigs until spring. Worth it for the monarchs butterflies.



### **Coral Bells**

*Heuchera 'Lillian's Pink'*

An evergreen perennial with dense green foliage from which stiff floral stems shoot up about 2 feet tall in spring and early summer, bearing pale pink flowers. It can tolerate sunnier conditions.



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### **Sand Dune Sedge**

*Carex pansa*  
(bioswale)

This is a grass-like perennial with triangular blades and clusters of dark brown nutlets as flowers. It's in our bioswale and though we have needed to water it for its first year, we trust that its roots have grown deep enough to weather drought. It also happens to be contented in sitting water, which is why it works so well in bioswales.

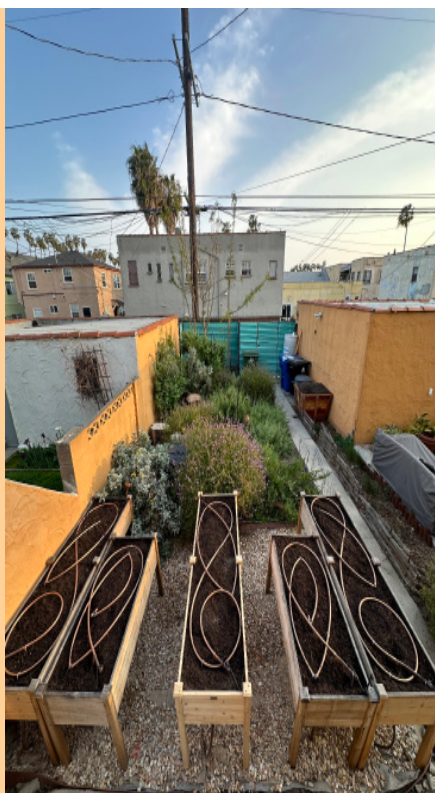




## **Moringa**

### ***Moringa oleifera***

Moringa is a short-lived, fast-growing, drought-resistant tree of the family *Moringaceae*, native to Northern India and used extensively in South and Southeast Asia. It's the only plant in our native garden (besides our "nano farm") that is not native. My wise friend and landscape architect Tesfaye Gulilat gave me seeds from the trees he'd planted in my parent's Arizona yard a year or so before his death; the trees in our back yard remind me of him every day. Tesfaye taught me how to harvest and dry the leaves for teas, or to put in salads and smoothies. According to the National Institutes of Health—that is, before Bobby Kennedy, Jr., got hold of it—*Moringa oleifera*, also known as the "tree of life" or "miracle tree," is an anti-oxidant and also important due to other medicinal and non-medicinal benefits. Traditionally, the plant is used to cure wounds, pain, ulcers, liver disease, heart disease, cancer, and inflammation.



### **Our nano farm, thanks to Crop Swap LA**

Founded by Jamiah Hargins in 2018, the Leimert Park-based Crop Swap L.A. team believes that food should be grown and consumed locally to reduce reliance on water and carbon intensive global supply chains—especially in food deserts like ours. This spring, we commissioned Crop Swap to plant herbs and veggies on our "nano farm" of 5 raised beds in the back yard. We'll keep some of the harvest but most will go to Crop Swap L.A.'s community-supported agriculture program (members all live within a mile of where the food is grown). Crop Swap will tend, harvest, and replant as needed, and will get a tax write-off for the value of the produce they take. It's a win-win, mutual-aid kind of thing. Check them out: [@lacropswap](https://www.instagram.com/lacropswap)