



HUMBOLDT BOTANICAL GARDEN

Eureka, California

Welcome to the Lost Coast Brewery Native Plant Garden!

During the winter months, most of the plants in the Native Plant Garden are in a dormant or semi-dormant state, having finished flowering and not yet starting new growth in earnest. Some of the most spectacular bloomers such as Matilija Poppy (*Romneya coulteri*) and 'Select Mattole' California fuchsia (*Epilobium septentrionale*) have been cut to the ground, leaving no trace of their summer and fall glory. December, January and February are months when little is in bloom, although many of the Native Plant Garden's 50 different types of manzanitas are an exception to this. Several will be in full bloom at any given time throughout the winter, attended by bumblebees and Anna's hummingbirds on all but the wettest or windiest days.

The Garden's plant textures are still of interest and perhaps most evident during this season's low-angle early morning or late afternoon light. Ground foraging winter bird use is high, evidenced by the mulch scattered onto the garden paths each day by their ambitious work. The vine maples, red alders, dogwoods, Oregon ash, cascara, willows, Pacific ninebark, and spicebush have lost the last of their leaves, exposing interesting branches and bark textures. The native plant garden's "bones" will be in full view for the next few months.

Removing storm damaged plants and debris and keeping weeds at bay are some of the most important tasks to be accomplished during this time of the year. Removing weeds from beds, paths, and road edges is a constant necessity without which the Garden would soon be overgrown and not worthy of display. A common myth about gardening with California native plants is they are maintenance free. Although generally pest free and not needing supplemental soil amendments, fertilizer or irrigation, attractive native plant landscapes do require some degree of pruning and the occasional removal of dead or poorly performing plants. Winter is a great time to stay ahead by frequent weeding and adding a thick layer of mulch to native plant garden beds. Mulch helps smother small weeds, protects the soil from erosion, and retains soil moisture during the dry season. It is usually a good idea to keep the mulch away from within a foot or so of the plant's base to discourage disease.

Winter is also the time of year for coppicing (severe pruning) many of the larger shrubs including spicebush (*Calycanthus occidentalis*), spirea (*Spirea douglasii*), pacific ninebark (*Physocarpus capitatus*), and Mock Orange (*Philadelphus lewisii*). While it may appear severe, this type of heavy pruning every two to three years results in vigorous, fresh growth the following season. Bunchgrasses such as Pacific reed grass (*Calamagrostis nutkaensis*), and California fescue (*Festuca californica*) are also groomed or sheared at this time of year to remove dead thatch and stimulate new growth.

We have planted over 1,100 specimens in the Native Plant Garden over the last nine years, including over 100 in 2023. Our Native Plant Garden plant collection now includes many unusual and rare shrubs, adding to its value as a conservation, display, and education garden. Combined with the large driftwood pieces, small boulders, and newly renovated garden beds, we anticipate an even more interesting display for 2024.

Come out and explore the Native Plant Garden on a winter's day and enjoy a quiet walk along the plant-lined gravel paths. You just might discover a few California natives to try in your garden!

---Mark Moore, Curator, mmoore1229@gmail.com

For more information or to volunteer please contact the Humboldt Botanical Garden, PO Box 6117, Eureka, CA 95502, (707) 442-5139, www.hbgf.org Be an Ambassador for the Garden. Like us and share your Garden experiences on our Facebook site at "Humboldt Botanical Garden" or on your favorite social media!