



NATIVE PERENNIAL BORDERS

used with permission of www.laspillitas.com

ADAPTED FROM AN ARTICLE BY ART TYREE, NURSERY MANAGER

You have seen those riotously colorful traditional flower borders in the coffee table garden books. Why must they be in England or Pennsylvania? You can make such a border with natives! Use the colors and fragrances, textures and rhythms of California, and see how satisfying it can be.

Let's say that your border is to be five to ten feet wide, with some soil mounding and large boulders. After establishment it is to be deeply soaked two times per month. The mounds need be no higher than about a foot. Group the rocks two or three together, burying at least one third of their mass. Clay soil? Work in gypsum and perlite for drainage.

Now for the plants. Select a few "solid" plants to anchor your plantings, small shrubs with attractive all-year foliage. Choose from among:

San Francisco Manzanita or Sunset Manzanita, depending on availability in your local nursery (*Arctostaphylos hookeri franciscana* or *Arctostaphylos 'Sunset'*)

Wayside Manzanita (*A. hookeri* 'Wayside')

Emerald Carpet Manzanita (*A. 'Emerald Carpet'*) - low-growing ground cover shrub

Creeping Mahonia (*Mahonia repens*)

Prostrate Juniper (*Juniperus communis saxatilis*)

Seaview Coffeeberry (*Rhamnus californica* 'Seaview')

Make sure to match your border width to the plant's known space characteristics. Manzanitas and Cleveland Sage can spread generously.

These low shrubs are invaluable for maintaining greenery in the border, particularly when some of the seasonal perennials go on summer vacation.

Next select several sturdy plants with long flowering seasons to establish major color in the border. Consider:

Sunflower Bush (*Encelia californica*)

San Diego Sunflower (*Viguiera laciniata*)

Robust Showy Penstemon (*Penstemon spectabilis*)

Fragrant and colorful Cleveland Sage (*Salvia*) and Apricot Mallow (*Sphaeralcea ambigua*)

Now, fill in with a wide variety of seasonally colorful plants. The smaller buckwheats are good here: *Eriogonum cinereum* with billowy masses of soft pink, and ruby-flowered *E. grande rubescens*. Monkey Flowers (*Mimulus*) are indispensable for summer color. *M. aurantiacus*, especially its buff-flowered local form, combines well with blues or reds. Penstemons star as filler with tall stems of lavender-violet (*Penstemon heterophyllus*) or scarlet (*P. centranthifolius*). Sea Coreopsis (*Coreopsis maritima*) brightens earliest spring with stunning long-stemmed daisies, while California Fuchsia (*Epilobium californica*) enflames the end of the season with brilliant scarlet trumpets.

After color masses are in place, add interest by locating some accent plants of special form and color. Clumps of Douglas Iris (*Iris douglasiana*) decorate their grass-like foliage with lavender blossoms in April. At the boulders spot some rosettes of Chalk Dudleya (*Dudleya pulverulenta*). And don't forget the several handsome native grasses: fountain-clumps of Deergrass (*Muhlenbergia rigens*), blue-bladed *Leymus condensatus* 'Canyon Prince', Tufted Hairgrass (*Deschampsia caspitosa*), and others.

To fill in the gaps, spot in some cheerful blue-flowered grass-like clumps of Blue-eyed Grass (*Sisyrinchium bellum*), and a few lace-like Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) with white flower bunches. Include, of course, the annual wildflowers, such as California Poppy, Baby Blue Eyes, Tidy Tips, Bell-flowered Phacelia, and Lupines.

Tidy low edging plants finish off the native border. Choices include various species of Alum Root (*Heuchera*), Beach Aster (*Erigeron glaucus*), and Conejo Buckwheat (*Eriogonum crocatum*).

Keep your border well-groomed by cutting back plants as needed after flowering. A light application of organic fertilizer in late winter will keep plants energetic and colorful.

We've suggested a wide choice of plants, with varying needs for water, shade, or location such as coastal or inland, so be sure to consult some of the following websites or ask a knowledgeable native plant nursery person for suggestions appropriate for your garden

Visit the [Theodore Payne Foundation](#) for Wildflowers and Native Plants, Inc. and view the plantings for ideas. Then make your own coffee table book border—with native plants.

[Tree of Life](#) has a great website - look here for plant culture. [Las Pilitas Nursery](#), in Escondido, has a great selection, is nearby and they also have a wealth of information at their website. Photos galore!

California Native Plant Society - San Diego Chapter

c/o San Diego Natural History Museum - P.O. Box 121390,
San Diego, CA 92112-1390 - gardening@cnpsd.org

