

A Water-Wise California Native Plant Design for Sunny Locations and Clay Soil

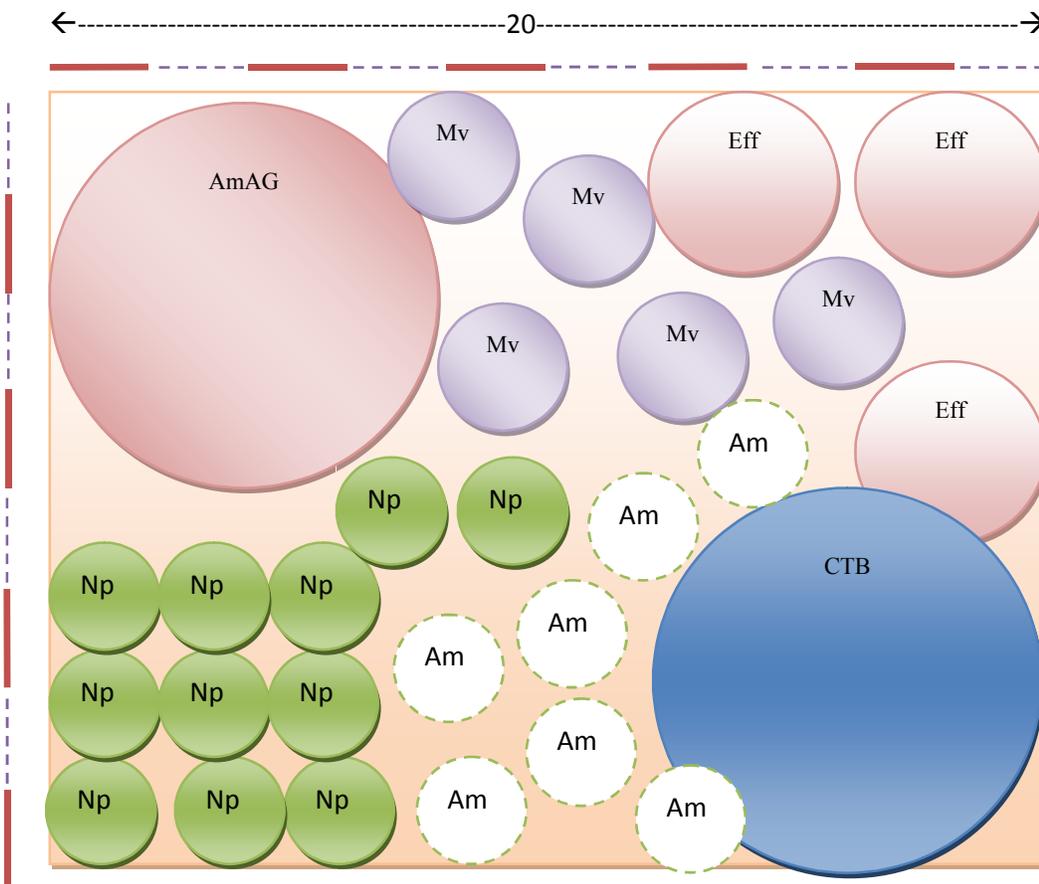
By native-again-landscape.com

Area: 16' x 20' rectangle

Site Characteristics: Full-sun, clay okay with drainage, neglect essential

Design Characteristics:

Blue, white, pink, and lavender flowers, all-year interest from foliage and flowers, mostly evergreen, moderate growth rate, all CA natives, insect, butterfly, bird, and wildlife-friendly, easy-to-modify design.



Plant list

- Am: Achillea millefolium 'Sonoma Coast' (Yarrow)—Quantity 7 (1 gal)
- AmAG: Arctostaphylos 'Austin Griffiths' (Austin Griffiths Manzanita)—Quantity 1 (5 gal)
- CTB: Ceanothus 'Tassajara Blue' (Mountain Lilac)—Quantity 1 (1 gal)
- Eff: Eriogonum fasciculatum spp. foliolosum (California Buckwheat)—Quantity 3 (1 gal)
- Mv: Monardella villosa (Common Coyote Mint)—Quantity 5 (1 gal)
- Np: Nassella pulchra (Purple Needlegrass)—Quantity 11 (1 gal)

Plant Descriptions

***Achillea millefolium* 'Sonoma Coast': (Sonoma White Yarrow)**



Size is 3' height by 2' width with dark green leaves. The plant is evergreen and bears dense white flowers in late spring. Prune out the dead flowers for further bloom. The plant will tolerate no, occasional, or moderate water. The foliage and dry flowers provides winter food to birds. The white flowers attract butterflies and insects.

***Arctostaphylos manzanita_x_densiflora* 'Austin Griffiths': (Austin Griffiths' Manzanita)**

Size is 8' height by 6' width. The plant is evergreen with glossy large green leaves, a red bark, and bears large clusters of small pink flowers from late December through February. This plant grows faster than many other manzanitas and has great disease resistance. It requires full sun and no summer water once established. This makes a beautiful small specimen tree with great wildlife value. This tree is visited by birds, butterflies, insects, and chipmunks. The berries appear in the fall and are edible.

***Ceanothus* 'Tassajara Blue': (Mountain Lilac)**

Size is 8' height by about 6' wide. The plant is evergreen and tolerates garden conditions. It has blue fragrant flowers that are also edible. For long life do not amend the soil and do not water in the summer once established. This is a fast and easy plant that can be sheared if needed.



***Eriogonum fasciculatum* spp. *foliolosum*: (California Buckwheat)**

Size is 3-4' height by 4+' width. The plant has needle-like leaves with white flowers in the spring that turn pink in the summer and rust in the autumn. The brown flowers commonly stay on through the winter providing food for birds. The flowers, leaves, and seeds are all useful to birds and butterflies. This is an important plant for wildlife. The plant needs sun, good drainage, and no supplemental water. It is a good plant for erosion control on hillsides.

Monardella villosa: (Common Coyote Mint)

Size is 2' height by 2' width. The plant has dark green leaves with lavender flowers from June until August. The plant needs full sun and will tolerate light shade. It prefers no summer water once established; wash off the dust occasionally. It will work in clay with good drainage. The flowers are great for butterflies. The plant can be pruned during late autumn if it gets straggly and it will grow back more compactly.



Nassella pulchra: (Purple Needle Grass)



Size is 1' height by 1' width, with flower and seed heads extending to 3', and slender foliage. Mature plants produce a few torpedo-shaped seeds each year with a thread-like awn attached, which makes the seed look like a needle and thread. This is California's best known bunchgrass and covered hillsides and forest openings.

It needs full sun and does well in dry clay soil. It does not mind being watered and works for hillside plantings. The roots of mature plants can extend 20' deep to survive drought. Plant at least 18" apart since the plants compete severely with each other for survival. Mass planting is effective for a miniaturized version of old California—with waving seed-heads in the afternoon breeze.

General Notes on the Care of Drought-Tolerant Plants

Drought-tolerant plants need water when young to establish their root system. Only after the root system is well-established can the plant withstand drought-like conditions. This typically means that for one or two seasons (of summer), the plant will need to be watered until its roots become extensive and the plant is considered established and robust. Regular watering does not mean daily watering if the soil is mulched and the soil has the capacity to stay moist for a week or more where the roots are mostly present. This could be so in clay and heavy soil. So it is essential to keep the soil mulched and to check the soil moisture at a depth of 4-6 inches to prevent over-watering. Under these conditions, and depending on the youth of the plant, the heat and sun exposure, the watering schedule for the first summer might vary between daily to weekly, or even monthly.

To illustrate two extremes, take the example of a drought-tolerant young plant in a pot in full sun, with fast draining potting soil might need daily or even twice daily water in 95F weather, while the same plant in clay soil that is mulched and under the same exposure conditions might only need to be watered once a week.

General Notes on Using Drought-Tolerant California Natives in the Garden

Although not all natives are necessarily drought-tolerant, the plants used in our designs are water-wise. This often means that these plants expect no water in the summer and have adopted many techniques to help them survive in the dry summer and wet winter conditions. Watering these natives in the summer will allow the abundant growth of root fungi that love warm, wet soil conditions and this can kill the native plants, or considerably shorten their lives. During the first year or two, when the plants are being established, occasional deep watering in the summer is necessary to establish deep roots. This does NOT mean daily sprinkler watering. If you are unsure of what you must do for your location and plant design, please email your question(s) to our customer service for clarification.

Most drought-tolerant California natives usually need good drainage, unless noted otherwise, and no fertilizing. Unless you have bad construction debris in your garden soil, do not amend the soil before planting, and do not use fertilizers. If you do have construction debris, then the optimal solution would be haul this away (some cost involved here), and replace with native soil from elsewhere in your local area. Organic mulches are good and several inches are recommended after planting. Shredded bark, leaves, redwood chips, are all good mulching material.

Set the plant in the ground with the crown slightly higher than the soil and mulch to within 3-4 inches of the crown without touching. After planting, water deeply with a small stream of water, a few inches away from the crown and apply water to all the surrounding soil. If planting in heavy clay, trickle the water to avoid run-off and to allow it to penetrate the soil. If the plant roots are still tiny, then avoid excess watering.



Some General Notes on Modifying the Given Design for Other Optional Features

- **Putting a garden bench or chair:** A garden bench or chair can be added by removing two of the buckwheat and one of the coyote mint and replacing with a bench for wildlife observation and enjoying your new space.
- **Accommodating a different shape or area:** If the area that you are planting is much larger or smaller, or the location-specific characteristics are different, then this design may not fit your needs. But if you are extending by perhaps fewer than 10 feet or less in either dimension, or your shape is not a perfect rectangle, then you might be able to retain the design with the tall Manzanita and Ceanothus providing the backbone, while using more of less of the smaller plants in the center. If an extension of 10 feet is required, then consider moving the Manzanita to a more interior location on the design to make it a single focal point, while adding another Ceanothus to provide an anchor to the right.

- **Building a path through the design:** The design can accommodate a path from top to bottom or left to right.. Simply draw a curvy path through the smaller plants, from one end to another and remove the plants that are on this path. A path made of mulch, decomposed granite, or stepping stones would all work.

Disclaimer:

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