

Buying Native Plants

by Charles Kennard

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There are many reasons why you may be looking for California native plants: for their low-water needs and maintenance; attractiveness; wildlife value; for creek bank stabilization; for a habitat restoration project you have in mind; or perhaps you want your garden to blend gradually into neighboring open space.

Finding them locally or even within an hour's drive can be a challenge, so here is a guide to some retail and wholesale nurseries selling California natives. We give preference to more accessible ones, and have excluded those stocking less than a handful of species, as well as excluding a nursery in our watershed that we cannot endorse because it diverts water directly from the creek to water its plant stock.

Nurseries generally emphasize either retailing a great variety of native plants for garden use, or providing plants for habitat restoration projects. The latter group propagates and grows plants in much greater quantities, and includes smaller pot sizes; these nurseries may sell retail or usually needs a lot of time-consuming attention from staff. Nonetheless, small discounts may be available for quantity buyers, and bigger discounts for non-profits and schools buying in quantity. Many nurseries have online plant catalogs for review.

A unique Marin nursery is Lerner Seeds in Bolinas (868-9407), which sells seeds of many native flowers, grasses, shrubs, vines and trees; the nursery sells on site, by mail, retail and wholesale. However, growing plants from seeds demands great attention to the species' needs.

Most buyers are looking for perennial species, shrubs, trees and vines, and the best time to plants natives is in the fall, after the rains begin, so roots have time to establish themselves before the summer drought. Regardless, nurseries do their biggest business in the spring, when humans get the urge to plant.

When patronizing a nursery, be aware of whether it is choosing ornamental plants responsibly. Some of our nurseries are selling very invasive non-native species, such as English ivy, South African daisy (Capeweed), licorice plant (*Helichrysum*), and periwinkle, that can and do escape into open space.



Most of the plants Friends of Corte Madera Creek Watershed has used in revegetation projects have been grown by North Coast Native Nursery, south of Petaluma. Photo by Charles Kennard

Local native plant nurseries:

O'Donnell's Nursery, 1700 Sir Francis Drake Blvd., Fairfax (453- 0372). This nursery has greatly improved its selection and quality of native plants over the past year, currently stocking about 60 species for gardens and essential species for creek or hillside locations. The staff propagates poppies and some grasses, and neither uses nor sells chemical fertilizers or pesticides on site. Most native berries are organically grown. Arboricultural and restoration advice is available. O'Donnell's is the best native plant source in eastern Marin.

Fairfax Lumber, 109 Broadway, Fairfax (578-4430). Sells about 30 species for the garden, either grouped in a "California Natives" section or mixed with other groupings, such as ferns. Some young trees and shrubs are grown on site.

West End Nursery, 1938 Fifth Avenue, San Rafael (454- 4175). A selection of manzanita and ceanothus cultivars is located in a "Natives" section, and a few shadeloving natives are elsewhere in this attractively laid out general nursery.

Sloat Nursery, 700 Sir Francis Drake Blvd., Kentfield (454-0262). Disappointingly, Sloat has very few native plants and no special section, presently stocking several ferns and a native currant.

Horticultural nurseries further afield (R/W: retail/wholesale):

Mostly Natives, 27235 Hwy 1, Tomales (707 878-2009) **R**. This is the best source in the county for the garden, and many natives are propagated on site. Open Wednesday through Sunday; closed December and January.

California Flora Nursery, 2990 Somers Ct., Fulton (707 528- 8813) **RW**. A good selection of native and Mediterranean plants for the garden, the former mostly propagated on site. Open every day, April–October; weekdays, November– March; closed for four weeks in winter.

Yerba Buena Nursery, 19500 Skyline Blvd., Woodside (650 851- 1668) **RW**. Over 600 native species are displayed within a two-acre garden. Open Tuesday–Saturday.

Nurseries specializing in habitat restoration:

North Coast Native Nursery, 2710 Chileno Valley Rd., Petaluma (707 769-1213) **RW**. A large selection propagated in quantity from North Bay sources, and most species can be grown to order. Retail sales Monday–Friday; visitors should call ahead. Edible berries are organically grown.

Circuit Rider Productions, 9619 Old Redwood Hwy., Windsor (707 838-6641) **RW**. Propagates plants for site-specific installation. Open by appointment only.

Watershed Nursery, 155 Tamalpais Rd., Berkeley (510 548- 4714) **RW**. Propagates plants for habitat projects in the Bay Area and Delta, recording the source of each species. Retail sales on Fridays.

Plant sales benefiting non-profits:

California Native Plant Society, Marin Chapter (332-4117). Annual April sale at Richardson Bay Audubon Center, Tiburon, including many plants grown by members, and suitable for the garden.

Marin Art and Garden Center, Ross (455-5263). Periodic sales of plants suitable for the garden grown on site.

San Francisco Botanical Garden (formerly Strybing Arboretum), Golden Gate Park (662-1316). Annual native plant sale in September, offering species propagated on site.

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