



*California Native Plant Society*  
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## My Brushpiles

*By Jeff Caldwell*

Last fall I had occasion to do some drastic pruning of a large blue elderberry (*Sambucus mexicana*) and a coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*) which had been planted for backyard wildlife habitat over twenty years ago. I didn't have any handy means of carting away such a large volume of prunings, so it became a good opportunity for me to personally test the wildlife value of properly constructed brushpiles.

I made a few large brushpiles in a weedy area of the yard which is only mowed occasionally. They were built on foundations of the largest logs and branches, with some attention to arrange them to create lots of hiding places. At each successive level, branches which were progressively smaller in diameter were used, and they were topped with leafy twigs.

Over the winter I was pleased to note flocks of small birds flying in or out of the piles, which provided good cover and a good place for them to find insects and spiders. In spring the piles were moved to a wildlife study area. At least five southern alligator lizards and more than twenty California slender salamanders were found under the piles, along with many worms, insects, isopods, millipedes, etc. Not bad for a suburban backyard!

If native vegetation must be pruned or cleared it can still provide great habitat value in the form of brush piles. Note that properly constructed piles are built exactly the opposite of the way one would build a bonfire; they should not present a fire hazard.

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## Wildlife Garden Tips

*By Jeff Caldwell*

- Choose species that flower and fruit at different times; with carefully chosen plantings, pollen, nectar, seeds and fruits of one sort or another will always be available.
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## *Wildlife Garden Tips*

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- Be sure to include a goodly number of deciduous plants; their yearly abundance of tender new growth and decaying plant parts provide sustenance for many creatures. Many fast growers and abundant fruit-bearers fit in this class.
- Think insects. Many interesting backyard wildlife species rely heavily or exclusively on insects for food. Begin taking more careful note of them and you will find that insects and other invertebrates themselves can be among the chief delights in the garden. Their beauty and diversity is a never-ending source of wonder and amusement; one Eastern entomologist recorded over 1400 species of insects in his suburban yard! Try using a magnifier.
- For deeper satisfaction and fewer problems I recommend keeping artificial feeding of wildlife to a minimum; instead, concentrate on working to improve the "carrying capacity" of your domain.
- Water features are invaluable in wildlife gardens. Also needed are "pioneers" to work with aquatic habitat-gardening. Many fascinating semi-aquatic and aquatic native plants and animals are becoming locally extinct; little is known about them or their culture.
- Taking notes and making species lists may add to your pleasure and facilitate the sharing of your observations.

**Species in each category below are listed in approximate order of flowering:**

### **Annuals**

**sun:** California poppy, bird's-eye gilia, goldfields, miniature lupine, owl's clover, tidy tips, succulent lupine, grand linanthus, globe gilia

**semi-sun:** miner's lettuce, Chinese houses, elegant clarkia

### **Perennials**

**sun:** Douglas wallflower, purple needlegrass, Ithuriel's spear, coyote mint, dwarf woolly sunflower, naked eriogonum, narrowleaf milkweed, Kellogg's yampah, Chilean aster, California fuchsia, California goldenrod, golden aster

**semi-sun:** hound's tongue, California toothwort, California strawberry, hummingbird sage, California fescue, Van Houtte's columbine, tiger lily, western columbine

**marsh:** spikerush, bur-marigold.

### **Shrubs and vines**

chaparral currant, California gooseberry, osoberry, California barberry, buckbrush, blue witch, twinberry, pink-flowering currant, brown dogwood, chaparral clematis, sticky monkeyflower, golden currant, California dogwood, California wild rose, California coffeeberry, toyon, western virgin's bower, California blackberry, thimbleberry, coyote brush, hollyleaf cherry, creambush.

### **Trees**

arroyo willow, coast live oak, California buckeye, blue elderberry.

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