

Visit a Drought Resistant Garden in its Glory

In the hills of Livermore snuggled in wine country is a garden that even in the chill of our northern California winter is beautiful. It has frequent visitors, but they are of the leaf nibbling and seed eating variety; rabbits and birds love this wide-open space. The garden is located in front of the Alameda County Agricultural Department that shares property with the Martinelli Event Center at 3585 Greenville Road.

Soon after the county buildings and event center were built, it was decided that the area in front of the county buildings would be offered to the Alameda County Master Gardeners. We were thrilled because this would give us a chance to do what we had been yearning to do for years: show people, by example, that gardening without much water and effort can create a beautiful space. Although the effort is minimal now, in fact, the area master gardeners meet only monthly to maintain the garden, the effort was substantial to get the garden going. As any good California gardener knows, it is all about the soil here, and it did take time and effort to grade and amend Livermore's clay soil to get it to provide the good drainage that plants require. Plants selected for the garden are either native California plants or plants that thrive in dry, Mediterranean conditions. The garden is also one of several test gardens for the UC Davis Arboretum All Stars, plants developed by the Department of Horticulture at UC Davis for their drought resistant and carefree qualities. Those plants that make the grade eventually end up in the local nurseries.

All plants in the garden are labeled which makes locating and noting plants easier. The garden proves to be an excellent place to see how plants the visitor is considering actually perform in windy, dry conditions. The UC Davis Arboretum All Star plants have a unique label which makes them easy to find. One might look for several varieties of ceanothus this spring, an amazing rose called Mutabilis 'Butterfly Rose' that flourishes in Livermore's summer heat, and many varieties of salvia that are at their peak in the autumn.

As happy as Master Gardeners are to have the garden frequented by furry and feathered friends, we would love to see human visitors, too! The garden is open to the public any time the Martinelli Center is open which is every day from 8:30 until 5:30. It is easily located by taking the Greenville Road exit off of Innerstate 580 and following Greenville Road south until the gates to the Martinelli Event Center are spotted. Master Gardeners are there the second Saturday of every month to answer gardening questions or to give an impromptu tour of the garden. The first four Saturdays on May, we will be in the garden from 10:00 until noon giving tours of the garden.

The garden is our pride and joy and we love sharing it!

Shari Wentz, Alameda County Master Gardener