

Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian for April

Nature's Natives

"Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better." – Albert Einstein



A broadleaf weed, cut leaf geranium needs to be pulled before it seeds.

By Cynthia Brian

Witnessed from outer space this spring, a pageant of splendor burst into bloom on hillsides, in fields, chaparrals, and desert environs. The "super blooms" of Southern California captivated hearts and cameras. Northern California is exhibiting a bountiful season of blue lupines, orange poppies, and gardens filled with flowers, just not to the degree of our neighbors to the south.

Although weeds are described as plants growing where we don't want them, weeds are in proliferation after our continual wet days. Wild cut leaf geranium resembles a ground cover when small with tiny pink petals, yet it is a weed that needs to be pulled before it scatters seeds. Hand removal of invasive grasses is also necessary as they create fire danger while outcompeting native flora for light, water, space and food.

More than 18,000 plant species are native to the United States and approximately 6,000 species are endemic to California. To be considered a true California native, the plants must have grown here before the late 18th century when the Europeans arrived. Our state flower, the California poppy, as well as lupines, fuchsias, and other "natives" were actually first cultivated in the gardens of Europe, yet we have adopted them as our own. We are blessed to grow numerous flora inhabitants from the Mediterranean that have acclimated to our mild four seasons and adapted to our clay soil. I have termed these friends, such as lavender and acanthus, "the new natives" as I like to include them in my garden designs.

Natives are drought tolerant after they have been established, al-

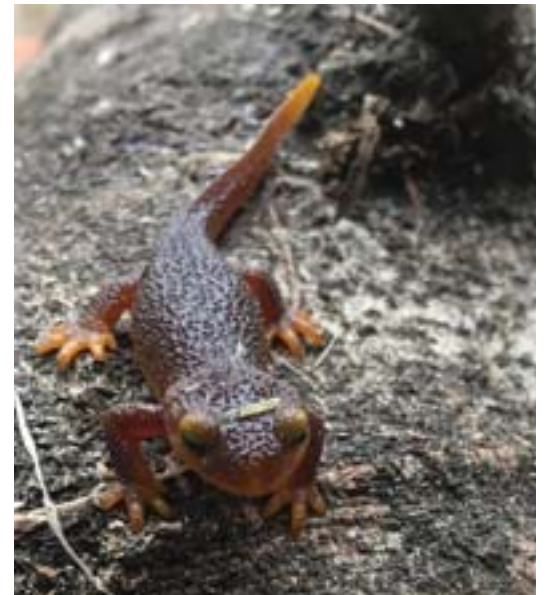


Spreading by underground runners, the Matilija fried egg poppy grows to 8 feet.

Photos Cynthia Brian

though they will require water if the weather has been exceptionally dry. They are wildlife attractors bringing songbirds, lizards, salamanders, butterflies, frogs, hummingbirds, bees, and other pollinators into the landscape. Minimal maintenance is required without dependence on pesticides or fertilizers. Top dressing all plants with mulch to maintain a constant temperature while reducing erosion and temperature fluctuations is advantageous.

For year-round interest, select a variety of natives that bloom during each of the 12 months. Wildflowers are fussy as transplants therefore for a spring show, sow seeds in the fall to allow the winter water to promote a strong root system. Plants with tiny seeds can live dormant in the underground seed bank for 80 years or more depending on the optimum conditions to coax them above ground to flower, fruit, and set seed. ... continued on next Page



Nicknamed a water dog, a juvenile salamander rests on a log.