President's Message:

Dear friends of the North San Joaquin Valley Chapter of CNPS,

Fall is once again fast approaching. Before we know it, it will once again be prime time for planting native plants. To help jumpstart your green thumbs, come check out the first meeting of the season on **Thursday, September 24th at 7:00 pm** at the Great Valley Museum Annex in Modesto. I will be giving a brief, hands-on introduction to landscape design with an emphasis on how to create a scale drawing of your full-size yard.

Thanks to the efforts of our newest board member and Restoration Chair, Julie Retner, we will have the opportunity to help the River Partners with their restoration efforts along the Tuolumne river and at the San Joaquin National Wildlife Refuge. Also, with Julie's help, our chapter will be helping quite some time. Other planned activities this year include:

- A home gardening with native plants Q&A talk I will be giving at Scenic Nursery in Modesto on Saturday, October 10 at 10:00 am.
- A field trip to work with Stephen Sheppard at the River Partners to learn about native plant propagation.
- A virtual garden tour at our January meeting...email me photos of your native (or mixed native) garden and come share your experiences with the rest of the chapter.
- Volunteer to help with restoring part of your local ecosystem by participating in a planting day with the River Partners in February.
Also, with Julie’s help, our chapter will be helping two local Boy Scouts with their Eagle Scout projects. Both projects will involve planting native plants for the Stanislaus Wildlife Care Center in Hughson. The projects will provide functional and educational value for the Center. Both Scouts are looking for assistance with funding and plant procurement. A third prospective Eagle Scout also contacted me recently about a native garden he is constructing for his project at Julien Elementary School in Turlock. With the increased level of activity and interest in native plants, the chapter board has unanimously agreed to set aside grant money for these and other community projects. What we are lacking, however, is a formal grant application.

I’d like to ask for two volunteers who are familiar with the grant writing process to invest some time to develop a short grant application form these eager youths can use to give their projects a much needed boost. Time is of the essence for this. Please contact me or Tana Dennen as soon as you can.

This year is shaping up to be one of the most active and exciting years our chapter has had in

Dedicated the preservation of California native flora
GONE NATIVE
By Lynn M. Hansen, Professor Emerita of Biological Sciences, MJC

Gardening With a Mark Twain had it right when he said “In the West, liquor is for drinking and water is for fighting.” In California, water is at a premium. This year marks the third consecutive year with below-normal rainfall producing statewide drought conditions. Some farmers have reduced their crop plantings due to their inability to secure enough water, cities continue to institute landscape water regulations and some are even considering water rationing. Homeowners faced with water intensive landscapes may soon experience less water, increased expense as water meters come on line or both. With these conditions in mind, more and more people are looking for alternative landscapes composed of drought tolerant plants. Enter the natives.

My first introduction to a native plant garden in Modesto was at the home of Margaret Flesher who said her garden all started with a “dirty valentine” from her husband Bim (Harold): a large delivery of sand for the front yard. From there the couple collected plants native to the Channel Islands searched native plant literature, talked with several experienced native plant gardeners and finally developed a landscape plan. We also decided to leave the shrubs, mostly campanula and California lilac, to set the stage for other plants.
there the couple collected plants native to the Channel Islands, high Sierras, coastal dunes, Mojave desert and valley grasslands which included deer grass, purple needle grass, desert willow, Cleveland sage, Coreopsis, valley oak and several varieties of buckwheat to name a few. Once one entered the gated inner courtyard, distinct mini plant communities were represented throughout. One could walk through the cool of a coastal redwood grove, along a riparian path of wild rose and golden current or through a patch of chaparral where California redbud was prominent. The garden was neatly groomed and burst into glorious bloom each Spring. Bim and Margaret were in love with each other as well as the refugia they had created and were eager to share their knowledge and plants with others.

Having witnessed such garden splendor my husband and I realized how ridiculous it was to pay a monthly fee for mowing, fertilizing, aerating and winter seeding of a lawn, not to mention the necessary watering to keep all of this looking green. Instead we could take advantage of native plants, preadapted to live in our Mediterranean climate of fall/winter rain, warm spring and arid summer. We decided to save money as well as water and go native!

The first task was preparing the space. We removed the lawn, added some sand to our loamy soil and thoroughly worked the soil with a rototiller. At the same time we re-
flowers each spring. In contrast with this shrub we placed two small shrubs of autumn sage (Salvia greggii) who provide brilliant red spring blossoms that look like snapdragons. Along the street edge of the garden is a wide swath of California fuchsia (Zauschneria), whose red-orange tubular flowers become a destination for the needlelike beaks of our resident hummingbirds all summer. Under the trees in the middle of the yard we planted coral bells (Heuchera sp., a white variety and a red variety). Also toward the back of the yard area near the established flowerbed we planted yellow-eyed grass, Douglas Iris, (blue-eyed grass (Sisyrinchium bellum), western Columbine (Aquilegia formosa) and three prostrate redwoods (Sequoia sp. ‘Nana Pendula’).

In the same area we placed two large patches of ‘Elfin’ creeping thyme (Thymus praecox) that would mimic two patches of green lawn we had re-

Douglas Iris

Fremontia want NO WATER during summer. Sulphur buckwheat grows with more vigor if it gets some water during summer. Yellow-eyed grass will spread rapidly if it gets water, but blue-eyed grass will die without summer water. California poppies come up wherever they want to, and not necessarily where you think you have planted them. Blue lupine leaves track the sun (turn toward the sun during the day), can be grown from seed and snails love them. Tiger lilies also need protection from snails. Native bees burrow into the soil of the garden providing aeration. Blue flax flowers bloom daily in the morning and are gone by afternoon. Our neighbors have grown accustomed to the grey green of our summer landscape and the burst of color each spring. The number of beneficial insect pollinators and birds visiting our garden of natives has increased. We have saved over $600 per year from lawn service charges and greatly reduced our use of water for landscape maintenance, all from going native. Our backyard is next!

For more information on gardening with natives, I recommend the following references:

of green lawn we had removed. Along the front walk, a trail of sea thrift thrusts tiny pink balls of flowers up from thick green mossy tufts each spring. Behind them are bulbs of Queen Fabiola Ithuriel’s Spear (Triteleia laxa) that produced masses of late spring dark blue floral umbels to welcome our guests. On the Eastern early morning and midday sun side of the garden we planted a Cleveland sage (Salvia Clevelandii), a coyote bush (Baccharis pilularis), blue flax (Linum lewisii) and a couple of sulfur buckwheat plants (Eriogonum umbellatum var. polyanthum). Finally along the driveway we have our miniature grassland of the garden, three squares of dirt surrounded by cement which contain California’s State grass, purple needle grass (Nassella pulchra) mixed with bulbs of giant onion (Allium unifolium).

What have we learned from going native? Native plants have a “mind of their own.” For example, purple needle grass, though planted in the middle of a plot of soil prefers to grow along the edges of cement and in the cracks, but not in the middle of a dirt patch. Fragrant shrubs of Cleveland sage become very large and will need to be cut back during the growing season. California fuchsia is invasive (propagates by seed and underground stems) and will be all over your yard unless you remind it where it is to live. Bush anemone and
CNPS North San Joaquin Chapter
475 Sunnyhill
Turlock CA 95380

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CHAPTER OFFICERS & CHAIRPERSONS-2008

PRESIDENT:   James Brugger  cnps.nsj@gmail.com   (209)667-2319
VICE PRESIDENT:   Alan Miller   dmsm95363@aol.com
SECRETARY:   Suzanne Guthrie  gu3s@hotmail.com
TREASURER:   Tana Dennen  dennent@yosemite.cc.ca.us
CONSERVATION:   Julie Rentner  jrentner@riverpartners.org
EDUCATION:   needed
MEMBERSHIP:   Tana Dennen  dennent@yosemite.cc.ca.us
NEWSLETTER:   Tana Dennen  dennent@yosemite.cc.ca.us
PLANT SALE:   Lucy Stutzin  link2lucy@yahoo.com
HOSPITALITY:   needed
PROGRAMS:   Lynn Hansen  hansenl@yosemite.cc.ca.us
FIELD TRIPS:   needed
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