

## ***Low Maintenance Landscape Plants for the North Coast***

Deborah Giraud, Dale Neiman, and Hans Koster

### ***1. Two garden areas were planted as demonstration/educational gardens.***

The North Coast Counties of Humboldt and Del Norte need current information on landscape species that are low maintenance and drought tolerant. Even though our area is not usually thought of as low water, in fact we get no summer rain, just some fog conditions. We do, however, need species that can tolerate wet soils in winter and no water in summer. The City of Fortuna is in the process of developing a city wide landscape plan for visible public areas. The opportunity arises to evaluate ground covers and shrubs in two areas of the city. The City wishes to reduce the maintenance (mowing, watering and fertilizing) of some turf areas without decreasing the esthetics, and several new parts of town are being developed which can be planned within this project as an educational opportunity for all residents. The Extension Farm Advisor wished to develop a list of recommended species of which we have actual

experience in this climate zone. In one area that was planted in this project we removed the turf and replaced it with low maintenance plants in a very visible center divider of a main boulevard. The center strip of Fortuna Boulevard is now planted with a variety of low maintenance and low water plant materials (labeled) that can viewed by professionals and homeowners for educational purposes. There are many more islands that will be planted out in the future. The other garden created is a new part of town, near new hotels and businesses. Thus the educational opportunity existed to publicize the project and get the information out to landscapers and homeowners.

The North Coast has had virtually no landscape plant material trials in the area of low maintenance and low water use. Our climate is different from the rest of the state in that we have high winter rain falls (30-50 inches per year), low winter temperatures (22 degrees Dec. 1990) and no summer water. Many of the suggested species in California publications have not been tested here. Much of the information is coming from Southern California and we fear the materials are too frost sensitive or will not tolerate the winter wet soils for six months. A strong species list needs to be developed that we have some local experience with. Professional landscapers and homeowners need a place they can visit to see landscape material. The objective to develop a list of recommended species suitable for low maintenance, low summer water and landscape beauty for the North Coast will be accomplished after the plants have a few years to grow so that I can evaluate them. The City of Fortuna and the CCC supplied all the needed labor to prepare the sites, install the materials and maintain the areas.

We are demonstrating to the Cities that low maintenance can be attractive and affordable. This small City with limited staff and resources can effectively propagate some of their own plant materials for public area use. The gardener is taking cuttings from the demonstration plants and has learned of many new species for potential use in the area.

The educational goals of starting a newsletter that will go out to all landscapers, retail nurseries and city parks staff in all North Coast cities (Fortuna, Eureka, Crescent City) about the project and where to view the plants and their progress is underway. This will be mailed four times over the next two years. A detailed species list and description of habit will be developed after the two year evaluation period. Nurseries will be encouraged to carry these materials and educational newspaper articles will inform the general public about the project and the list of recommended species.

We hope to demonstrate to the Cities that these types of gardens and landscape strips are affordable and better looking than some of the traditional landscapes.

## ***2. Tasks Completed***

A Landscape Committee was established with myself, City of Fortuna Planner, City Gardener, and administrative staff, several Fortuna Garden Club members and a representative from the Chamber of Commerce. The Committee met monthly all the first year and we accomplished the following:

- found two sites in the city for demonstration gardens
- developed landscape plans for both utilizing garden club volunteers and a Master Gardener
- discussed maintenance responsibilities and established a relationship with the California Conservation Corps for the second site for continuous maintenance, the first site will be maintained by the City

I took a trip to Mendocino County and purchased some plant material for the project. Two specialty nurseries were visited and some new and unusual plants were found to put in the trial. Labels were purchased for the garden and the plants labeled.

The City Gardener and I are evaluating propagation of several of the plants and reviewing the feasibility and economics of his nursery stock

replacement program. He has had good success with propagation of most of the plants and a list will be generated.

The City Planner (now the City Manager) agreed to do the irrigation systems since our grant bought all the plants. The Garden club agreed to plant the first site. The CCC wants a park designed adjacent to the garden so we are assisting in that. The City got a grant from Cal Trans to landscape the entire 12th Street extension (the garden is on 12th St.) so the whole area will eventually be finished. The City finished their draft of the Landscaping and City Entrance Beautification Program for their City plan which will go before the Council.

The sites were prepped and planted fall 1993. The plants were labeled and a beautiful redwood sign was made. Educational outreach is just beginning as the plants are just starting to grow and look like something. The public relations is being planned for a garden dedication and educational tours of the sites.

## ***3. Brochure and Plant list to be distributed at the site.***

### ***The North Coast Low Maintenance, Drought Tolerant Demonstration Garden***

Welcome to this demonstration garden! We hope you enjoy learning about these plants and that you find inspiration for your home or business landscape. History of the garden. The UC Cooperative Extension Farm Advisor, Deborah Giraud, received a grant from the Elvenia J. Slosson Endowment for Ornamental Horticulture to create a garden in Humboldt County where homeowners, business owners, City and County Parks Departments, and landscapers could see plants growing that are drought tolerant and low maintenance. Some familiar plant genres are growing here, but many are new selections that have not been seen before. Working with the City of Fortuna and the California Conservation Corps, this site was selected and developed. This new garden is a joint effort (both time and dollars) of the following groups:

- The Slosson Endowment for Ornamental Horticulture
- University of California Cooperative Extension Farm Advisor, Deborah Giraud
- City of Fortuna (special thanks to Dale Nieman, Corrine Stanfield and Hans Koster)
- California Conservation Corps (Special thanks to Mel Krebs, Bob, Freschou, Ron Jones and all the crews)

### **Objectives:**

To develop a list of recommended species that grow well in the North Coast. Our climate has dry summers and very wet winters. Many species recommended for low maintenance, drought tolerant landscapes have been tested in Southern California. We want to see if they will thrive here as the very wet winters could set them up for root rot problems, and our dry, but cool, summers may not be enough heat for them. We want to introduce the North Coast to new species and selections and to demonstrate to all gardeners, but especially municipalities and county parks, that these shrubs and ground covers are affordable, attractive and low maintenance.

### **The Plant Materials:**

Many drought tolerant plants are from the climate regions of the world called Mediterranean. Of course the areas around the Mediterranean Sea come to mind first. But there are several other regions with similar climates; parts of California, the area around Perth, Australia and parts of Chile. Plant collectors have brought into the horticultural trade many plants that have evolved in this climate type. The typical climate features are wet winter and dry summers. Dry summers can mean as long as 6 months with no water! These plants have evolved to grow their root systems during the fall and winter when moisture is available. Many beautiful plants are available now that do not require summer water, and many more are being collected, selected and hybridized.

### **Care of these landscape plants:**

When first planted as young nursery stock these plants do need some water to get established. The first year you should water them once a week during hot weather, longer intervals if fog and clouds prevail. The second year they need to be weaned; water only once a month and the third year perhaps every two months. These recommendations are generalized, look at the plants for signs of serious water stress. If you keep watering them often, they will not grow up to be drought tolerant. You must wean them off of water which is their natural condition. It is important to know the origin of your plants; research out which region of the world they come from and what climatic zone.

### **The Plants: (listed alphabetically)**

Notes: species and variety are naturally occurring plants, a cultivar is a human made selection; stands for cultivated variety). All the plants in this garden were selected to be under 4 feet high. The underlined names are the botanical names, common names follow.

Arctostaphylos Manzanita - Western USA natives, many species and varieties. Control growth by frequent pinching in the growing season. Not for shade. Known for their pink flowers and red fruits and red bark.

A. 'Carmel Sur' - 18" high x 6' wide: few flower

A. 'Emerald Carpet' - 1.5' x 6' Green, uniform, urn shaped flowers, (white to pinkish)

A. uva-ursi 'Radiant' Bearberry - 6"x 12' Spreads and roots as it creeps. Useful for slopes.

A. thymifolia 18"x 4

Ceanothus gloriosus 'Anchor Bay' - 2' x 4' Wild lilac. Native to California, these popular plants are known for their blue flowers and shiny green leaves. If you water them in summer they will get root rots.

Cistus Rockroses - these evergreen shrubs are becoming more and more popular. Native to the Mediterranean area, they are hardy to 15 degrees, fast growing, and sun loving. Will tolerate ocean wind and salt sprays.

C. albanicus - pink flowers, to 4' tall

C. pulverulentus - 'Sunset' - deep magenta pink flowers, 2-3' tall by 5' wide.

C. palhinhaii - sticky leaves, white flowers with large white/yellow centers, to 4' tall

Cotoneaster - Many species of all heights. Vigorous growers with little to no maintenance needed. Known for red berries.

C. dammeri 'Emerald Spray' - 4' x 8' Branches root freely

C. microphyllus - tiny, deep green leaves, red berries and snow white

Penstemon Beard Tongue Evergreen shrubs, few widely available, many in specialty nurseries. Hummingbird flowers. Full sun, fast drainage.

P. heterophyllus 'Blue Bedder' - Native to Sierra foothills and Coast ranges of Calif. 12-24" high. Lavender to intense gentian blue April-May

P. 'Midnight' - (purple) 3-4' tall

'Garnet' (red) 3-4' tall

Rosmarinus officinalis - Rosemary Evergreen shrubs and herb. Lavender blue flowers in winter and spring. Leaves used as an herb. Endures hot sun and poor soil, needs little water. Tip, pinch and prune.

R. o. 'Alba' - upright to 4' tall, white flowers

R. o. 'Majorca pink' - upright to 4' tall, leaves small, greyish; lilac pink flowers

R. o. 'Collinwood Ingram' - To 2-2 1/2' tall. Spreads 4'. Graceful curving branches, rich bright violet blue flowers.

Santolina, evergreen subshrubs. Clip off spent flowers. Whitish grey leaves. Yellow flowers in summer.

Santolina chamaccyparissus 'Nana' - low shrub forming tight mound, 12-18" by 18" wide.

Saponaria primila - Usual species seen is S. ocymoides. Perennial ground cover.

Teucrium Germander Evergreen shrubs - Tough plants for heat, sun poor soil.

T. chamaedrys - Low growing 1' high. Pink flowers, set against deep green, glossy leaves.

T. majorcan

Thymus Thyme. Ground covers or erect, shrubby perennial herbs.

T. vulgaris 'Argenteus' Silver thyme - Variegated leaves.

T. citriodorus 'Limi' Lemon thyme - Flowers; 2-3' tall, spreading to 6' or more

Erica Heath Evergreen shrubs - with species from three regions; Northern Europe, Mediterranean and S. Africa. Need excellent drainage and acid soils. Prune flowering wood back after bloom, but don't cut too deeply.

E. darleyensis 'Furzey' - Bushy, 14-18" tall, Dark green leaves. Deep rose pink flowers, Dec.-April. Spreading vigorous plant.

E. 'Dawn' - Spreading mound, 12". Green leaves, new growth golden. Deep pink, June-Oct. Excellent ground cover, easy to grow, hybrid between E. ciliaris and E. tetralix.

E. vagans 'Mrs. D.F. Maxwell' - Bushy, rounded to 18", dark green leaves, cherry pink or red leaves in July-Oct. Outstanding for color and heavy bloom; widely grown.

Erigonium umbellatum Buckwheat group - Sulfur flower. Native to the western USA. Full sun, well

drained soils. Need no water once established. Will self seed if flower stalks left to fully mature. Shape when young, not attractive for too many years as they get leggy. Tiny yellow flowers.

Halimium ocymoides Evergreen shrubs - closely related to Helianthemum (sunroses); cultural requirement the same. 2-3 ' high, gray green leaves, yellow flowers in spring with deep red blotch at base of petals.

Halimicistus sahucii. Evergreen shrub - hybrid between Halimium umbellatum and Cistus alvifolius. to 2' high with summer white flowers with yellow stamens. Sunny rock gardens, dry banks, cascading over walls. May not tolerate wet soils.

Helianthemum Sunroses - Evergreen low growing shrubs. Can bloom from April through fall. Shear back after flowering.

H. nummularium - four cultivars in this garden: 'Stoplight' (red), 'Rose' (pink), 'Pumpkin' (bicolor orange and burnt orange), 'Buttercup' (yellow) 6-8" high.

Lavendula augustifolia English Lavender Evergreen - shrubs that require full sun, well drained soil. Prune after bloom to keep plants compact. Used for perfume and sachets.

L.a. 'Hidcote' - slow growing to 1 foot tall, deep purple flowers.

L.a. 'Munstead' most popular dwarf, to 18" with deep lavender flowers, a month before species.

L. 'Fred Boutin'

L. stoechas 'Questi' - not fragrant

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