

PLANTS AT LEITNER GARDEN, ORINDA, 2023

Trees



Aesculus californica, California buckeye

The brilliant green clusters of California buckeye leaves are one of the first true signs of spring. Buckeye flowers in May or June then goes dormant in the summer. These buckeyes, planted in 2011, are about 12 feet tall. You can see a few "volunteers" in the garden, probably moved upslope by squirrels



Quercus agrifolia, Coast live oak

The iconic tree of Oakland, and the most common native tree in the East Bay. The trees shading the parking strip are volunteers, each about 30 years old. In 2022 they produced abundant acorns, to the delight of the jays, band-tailed pigeons, and woodpeckers. We have made acorn bread and cookies—a lot of work—with a new appreciation for Ohlone home economics.



Quercus lobata, Valley oak

This individual grew from an acorn from the Hospice Tree of Lights in downtown Orinda in 2007. Native Here Nursery grew it into a seedling, and we planted it in 2008. Its gigantic parent gives you an idea of its potential! We planted it far from the house so it would have plenty of room to grow. Will this year be the first acorn crop?

Shrubs and Subshrubs



Artemisia californica, California sage

One of the great "scratch and sniff" plants in this garden, California sage is scattered along the periphery of the garden, on the edges of the driveway and parking strip. It does well on hot, dry slopes, and can be pruned back for a more tidy appearance.



Artemisia douglasiana, Mugwort

This is an herbaceous perennial that dies back to a woody base. It grows exuberantly in "The Triangle", a tangle of shrubs and herbs designed to provide wildlife habitat. In nature it is often found in slightly moist places, like streambanks and terraces. Its leaves have a spicy, sage-y fragrance. Trim back to the ground in winter.



Corylus cornuta var. *californica*, California hazelnut

Several of these lovely shrubs grow in "The Triangle" and another is at the upper corner of the garden near the street. It is a slow growing, deciduous shrub with velvety leaves. Native Americans coppiced hazelnut to produce strong, flexible rims for their basketry. In nature it grows in slightly moist places such as tiny seeps or on streambanks.



Frangula californica, California coffeeberry

A versatile and attractive native shrub, coffeeberry has glossy evergreen leaves, small, creamy flowers, and fruits that mature to a glossy blue-black. It can be hedged and pruned. Look for coffeeberry around the perimeter of this garden. Voles and a very dry summer in 2022 killed several coffeeberries.



Garrya elliptica, Silktassel

Uncommon in the East Bay, this big-boned evergreen shrub produces long-dangling clusters of flowers and fruits. It can be shaped and pruned, but needs some space to show off its beauty. We have one male silktassel in front of the chimney, where it has room to expand. It is slowly achieving a nice size and shape.



Heteromeles arbutifolia, Toyon

A versatile and good-looking evergreen shrub, toyon can grow quite tall but can be shaped and contained by pruning. In this garden toyons are found around the periphery. The toyon near the driveway (the sunniest site) is the largest. The colorful red berries are enjoyed by robins, cedar waxwings, and a host of other birds. Toyon "volunteers" in this garden, a sure sign site conditions are favorable.



Holodiscus discolor, Ocean spray

This shrub likes shady streambanks, growing from a defined multi-stemmed base rather than via runners. We recently removed a patch of rowdy snowberry next to the house, and replaced it with two small and, we hope, better-behaved ocean spray shrubs. Both provide medium-height, deciduous, fine-textured foliage.



Lupinus albifrons, Bush lupine

This shrub produces masses of brilliant purple flowers for a month or longer in spring. The rest of the year its gray-green foliage is a soothing presence. The garden is becoming more shady so habitat is limited. Look for it in the sunnier parts of the tall shrub section.



Mimulus aurantiacus, Bush monkeyflower

A popular shrub with a wide range of tolerances in nature, bush monkeyflower can be found on hot, dry slopes with California sage, where it grows slowly and goes dormant in summer. Where conditions are more moderate, this evergreen shrub flowers and remains green longer. In this garden, look for them along the rocks near the parking strip, one of the sunnier parts of the garden.



Monardella villosa ssp. *villosa*,
Coyote mint

Another wonderful "scratch and sniff" plant, the natural home of this small shrub is on exposed rock outcrops. It can be used to make a tea, and produces delightful clusters of pink-purple flowers in late spring. Here, a few grow above the brick retaining wall.



Rhamnus crocea, Redberry

This slow-growing, tiny-leaved evergreen shrub is uncommon in the East Bay. Our redberries form low, sprawling mounds on the outer edges of the tall shrub section. Their tiny creamy flowers will be followed eventually by bright red berries.



Ribes menziesii, Canyon
gooseberry

Canyon gooseberry is a small- to medium-sized deciduous, thorny shrub. In nature it grows in openings in oak woodland, which is about the habitat where it is found in this garden—under the oaks.



Ribes sanguineum var. *glutinosum*,
Red-flowering currant

Beloved for its spicy-smelling leaves and very early spring flowers, this deciduous shrub is a bit gangly but can be pruned. In moist conditions it grows quickly; in drier sites it lives longer and grows more slowly. Much appreciated in late winter by hummingbirds. Just one currant plant is in the garden, on the east side above the retaining wall.



Rosa gymnocarpa, Wood rose

This delicate, deciduous shrub is occasional in oak woodland in the East Bay, in many plant communities throughout its range. In our garden it likes the morning sun and mostly shade in the rear side yard where it grows with cow parsnip.



Salvia mellifera, Black sage

Common in chaparral, black sage thrives in hot, dry, well-drained conditions. Although most of this garden is not well-suited, the southwestern corner near the driveway gets late-afternoon sun. Most plants can't tolerate it, but black sage is doing well here, even under a coast live oak!



Sambucus nigra var. caerulea, Blue elderberry

Fairly common in moist chaparral, forest openings, and sometimes small seeps. A fast-growing, rangy shrub, it produces umbrella-shaped clusters of creamy yellow flowers, followed by large clusters of blue-white berries. A favorite with birds. In our garden, one elderberry is thriving in "The Triangle." Takes heavy pruning in this moist site.



Symphoricarpos albus var.
laevigatus, Snowberry

You can find this deciduous, moderate-sized shrub on dry slopes and streambanks in oak woodland throughout the East Bay. It grows exuberantly in the shade of our house, and in rows behind the California fescue surrounding the meadow, spreading by runners.

Vines



Aristolochia californica, California
pipevine

Foodplant for the stunningly beautiful pipevine swallowtail, this vine grows along streamsides, openings in forests, and in moist chaparral. We have planted it in several different locations in our garden, searching for a site where it will thrive and attract butterflies. We currently have one small plant in "The Triangle".



Lonicera hispidula Chaparral
honeysuckle

As John Danielsen once said, this is a great plant for covering a fence, or anything else. Evergreen, this vine clammers over all, producing pink, tubular flowers and red berries. In this garden, look for it on the fence, and on the eastern upslope.



Vitis californica, California grape

It's hard not to play favorites when you have a California grape. Winter-deciduous, its natural habitat is the banks of perennial streams, like San Pablo Creek. Our pride and joy forms a summer canopy over the arbor, and the fruits are enjoyed by bluebirds, sparrows and jays. The older vine is suffering from a fungus, but a new volunteer has started on another corner of the arbor.

Ferns



Adiantum jordanii, California maidenhair

Most of our ferns like moister sites than our garden, so these are kept as pets in containers where we can give them the water they need. This beautiful fern grows on shady moss-covered canyon walls. Ours is in a small container near the front door.



Dryopteris arguta, Wood fern

This winter-deciduous fern is reported as being locally common, and is found fairly frequently on shady, wooded slopes in the East Bay. Ours grow in two containers on the front porch. When they go dormant, they move to the back yard, and when they burst forth again, they return to their place of honor.



Polypodium calirhiza, Polypody

The commonest fern on shady roadcuts; look for it in early spring along shady roads in Tilden Park. It unfurls in late winter, then goes dormant in summer. When it's dormant it rests in the shade in the back yard.



Polypodium scouleri, Leather fern

Fairly uncommon in the East Bay, this is slow-growing fern has tough, leathery fronds. It often grows on the bark of old-growth trees. This one grows in a shallow container near the front door where it gets plenty of shade.



Polystichum munitum, Sword fern

Durable, sturdy, and good-looking, some of the ferns in the shade along the house are probably 50 years old, a holdover from the previous owner's garden. We prune the older leaves for tidiness, but one year I want to leave them alone. Swainson's thrushes nest only in old sword fern fronds; their melodious, haunting call would be worth it!



Woodwardia fimbriata, Giant chain fern

The largest fern in California, this holdover from the Cretaceous has fronds up to 6 feet long. It only grows in permanent seeps and along streams, so we keep ours in half oak barrels in deepest shade near the house, where we water them often.

Ground Covers



Achillea millefolium, Yarrow

This delicate, lacy perennial herb is easy to grow, summer-dormant. In late spring it sends up tall stalks with clusters of white heads of flowers. When they have gone to seed, we give it a haircut, water it once, to prolong the green, then let it take a summer nap.



Asarum caudatum, Wild ginger

The natural habitat of wild ginger is shady redwood forests; in our garden it hugs the deepest shade under shrubs and ferns near the house. Its leaves have a spicy, gingery smell, and the unusual red flowers are pollinated by flies. It self-sows where it's happy.



Clinopodium douglasii, Yerba buena

Another adaptable ground cover, evergreen and minty. It grows naturally under coyote brush, California sage, and monkeyflower on dry, sunny slopes, and it also is happy in more shady situations. Look for it under shrubs near the house. Makes a tasty tea.



Epilobium canum, California fuchsia

A great plant for summer color and beloved by hummingbirds, California fuchsia is often seen on rock outcrops, roadcuts, and generally sunny situations. Prune it back after the last flowers for a neater look. Ours clamber over the rocks along the parking strip and creep around in the meadow.



Fragaria vesca, Strawberry

This tiny-fruited strawberry makes a lovely ground cover and provides delicious fruits. Look for it in the bit of meadow on the shady side of The Triangle and under the bird bath.



Maianthemum stellatum, Slim Solomon's seal

Solomon's seal grows in shady canyons with light canopy cover. This ground cover emerges in late winter, produces loose clusters of white, starry flowers, and then does dormant in summer. In our garden, it grows best in dry shade near the house.



Prunella vulgaris var. lanceolata, Lanceleaf selfheal

We needed a moisture-tolerating ground cover for places that get extra water—below the bird bath, for example, where it's too wet for most native grasses, and in fairly deep shade near the patio.

Perennial and Annual Herbs



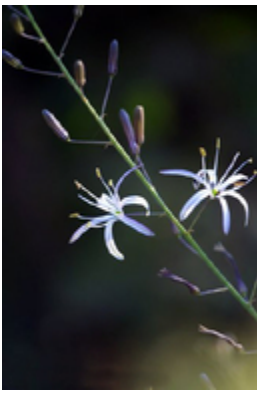
Angelica tomentosa, Woolly angelica

Woolly angelica is said to be one of the most versatile Native American medicinal plants. Just one plant, a perennial from a deep taproot, grows at the corner of the patio. In summer large umbrella-shaped clusters of flowers grow on stalks 6-7 feet high!



Asclepias fascicularis, Narrow-leaved milkweed

Known for its role as a monarch larval foodplant, narrow-leaf milkweed is the commonest milkweed in the East Bay, and the best for monarch butterflies because their seasonal development is synchronized. Narrow-leaved milkweed does well in summer-dry soils like the meadow in this garden.



Cholorogalum pomeridianum, Soap plant

Soap plants have spidery clusters of strap-shaped leaves growing from a perennial corm. Flowers are white and open at dusk, much enjoyed by bumblebees. Site conditions must be ideal here because it grows like a weed in this garden. I've roasted the corm à la Ohlone style (bitter) and made brushes from the stiff leaf bases.



Clarkia concinna and *Clarkia purpurea*, Red ribbons and four-spot

We aim to establish self-sustaining populations of native plants, including annuals like these, in the garden. Some four-spot have persisted since 2021; in 2023 we are trying red ribbons. These provide late spring color after grasses have dried.



Collinsia heterophylla, Chinese houses

This cute little annual is usually found on shady slopes, so we are trying it out in 2023 on the eastern slope of the garden among gooseberry, snowberry, cow parsnip, and coffeeberry.



Drymocallis glandulosa, Sticky cinquefoil

This lovely little member of the rose family grows in partial shade under shrubs on moist hillsides. A couple of them are more or less hidden in The Triangle.



Eriogonum nudum, Naked buckwheat

Great butterfly and bee plants, buckwheats are usually found on rocky or sandy sites with little competition. Although planted next to the rows of California fescues, they are creeping forward and downslope where it's more open.



Eschscholzia californica, California poppy

These are exuberant plants in gardens; they fill in a new garden and empty spots when you are editing your garden, as I am with the meadow. You can always dial them back. An iconic plant that requires no care!



Grindelia camporum, Great Valley gumplant

Another experiment in summer color, we tried out this summer-blooming perennial and it did well along the line of California fescue, so we added lots more. It seems happy here and is enjoyed by many bees.



Heracleum maximum, Cow parsnip

Cow parsnips are tall, elegant denizens of the oak woodland, growing up to 6 feet or more. This herbaceous perennial self-sows like mad in this garden, and a forest of them has grown up on the east side of the house. If you would like seeds, let me know!



Heuchera micrantha, Alumroot

A sweet little perennial inhabitant of slightly moist, shady sites in oak woodlands and canyons, this herb produces a rosette of toothed, heart-shaped leaves and a delicate spray of tiny white flowers.



Holocarpha heermannii,
Heermann's tarplant

This is a tall annual, very late- and long-flowering. This species has persisted for a couple of years, so I am hoping it will continue to grace the meadow portion of this garden.



Iris douglasiana, Douglas iris

This species is uncommon in nature in the San Pablo Creek watershed; these were sourced from an East Bay garden. This rhizomatous perennial needs to be thinned occasionally to bloom most profusely. These irises have a wide range of flower color from pale to deep purple.



Madia sativa, Coast tarplant

Much less showy than its relative, Heermann's tarplant, coast tarplant has smaller, lighter yellow flowers that bloom in late summer. A handful of these annual plants were introduced to the meadow portion of the garden in 2023.



Perideridia kelloggii, Kellogg's yampah

The carrot-like roots of the perennial yampah were a food for Native Americans. Yampahs flower mid-summer and are attractive to bees and butterflies, and are a larval foodplant for the anise swallowtail butterfly.



Ranunculus californicus, California buttercup

These are some of the earliest and brightest spring wildflowers in grasslands throughout the Bay Hills. I am hoping we can encourage this short-lived perennial to persist in the meadow portion of the garden.



Sanicula crassicaulis, Pacific sanicle

This sturdy perennial member of the carrot family is very common in light shade in oak woodland. It flowers fairly early, producing a wide stem of small yellow flowers. It has persisted well in the more shady portions of the meadow.



Scrophularia californica, Bee plant

This relatively tall, short-lived herbaceous perennial is commonly found in moist shade in the East Bay Hills. A few plants may be spotted in the tangle of The Triangle. Its flowers are relatively small, but it is a favorite of native bees.



Sisyrinchium bellum, Blue-eyed grass

Once much more common in East Bay grasslands, the perennial blue-eyed grass is still found in lightly grazed or ungrazed grasslands. Look closely at the flat sprays of leaves and you will see the resemblance to iris, which is in the same family. Blue-eyed grass persists in the meadow portion of my garden, and I am gradually dividing them to encourage them to increase.



Symphotrichum chilensis,
American aster, Common aster

Reported as occurring in grasslands and disturbed places, this sounded like a plant for my garden, so I planted a few individuals in 2019. It has done well in the partial shade of the oak region of the garden, spreading by runners. It flowers relatively late and long, adding color to the summer garden.



Toxicoscordion fremontii, Death
camas, Fremont's star lily

Reported from grassy or wooded slopes, I wasn't sure where this perennial bulb might thrive in my garden. In early 2023 I planted three individuals in different conditions of light and one flowered soon after!



Verbena lasiostachys, Western
verbena

Since this herbaceous perennial grows along streams and other wet places, in 2022 we planted it under the bird bath, an area too wet for many of our grassland species. Sure enough, it thrived and overwintered. It is very popular with many of our small native bees, and flowers for a long period from early to late summer.



Wyethia angustifolia, Narrow-leaved mule ears

This large-flowered perennial grows on north-facing grasslands. Where to plant it in the garden? In 2023 I tried three individuals in different conditions of light. Since it's a late bloomer, we will wait to see if it thrives!

Grasses, Sedges and Rushes



Carex praegracilis, Deer bed sedge

A few years ago I realized I a lot of mis-identified, frequently confused exotic (*Carex divulsa*) that became quite invasive in the meadow. I am engaged in a remove-and-replace program with the real deal: a better-behaved, smaller sedge—look for small, bright green clumps in the meadow.



Deschampsia elongata, Slender hairgrass

A lovely annual or short-lived perennial true to its name, this is a slender, delicate, bright green grass that's content to grow here and there—in openings in oak woodland, or at the edges of the meadow here.



Festuca californica, California fescue

Its natural habitat is described as dry open forest, moist streambanks and chaparral. It's one of the visually dominant plants in this garden, forming a line above the meadow and around The Triangle. We treasure these grasses because California quail sometimes nest under them.



Juncus effusus, Common rush

One of the larger perennial rushes in the East Bay, this is an important Native American basketry plant. It often grows in fairly moist places in full sun. So the plants in The Triangle are a bit dry and lacking in bright light. I harvest the stems about once a year.



Juncus patens, Blue rush

This rush grows in the driest sites occupied by East Bay rushes, often just low places with a little subsurface seepage. It's shorter than common rush with a more open inflorescence and a gray-blue cast to the foliage and stems. It volunteered in the garden a couple of years ago. It forms a dense clump and can be thinned out occasionally.



Juncus occidentalis, Western rush

This delicate perennial rush only grows about a foot tall and is found in "moist, often sunny" sites. It volunteered in the meadow a few years ago, possibly as a hitchhiker, but I am encouraging it. I see it in more coastal grasslands more often than here in my watershed.



Stipa lepida, Foothill needlegrass

As the name suggests, this species is found in openings in dry chaparral, rocky places, and dry grasslands. When I started the meadow, foothill needlegrass made up a minority, but its delicate size is more suitable to the small area. I collect seeds and give them to Native Here to start for me as I gradually add more to the meadow.



Stipa pulchra, Purple needlegrass

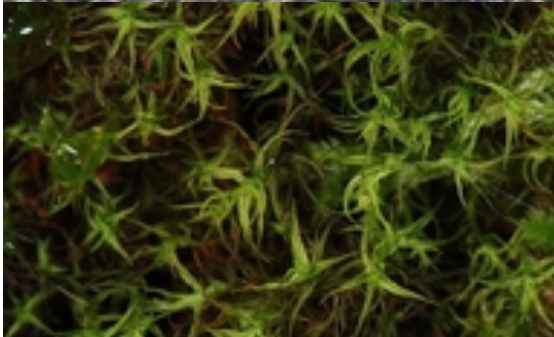
California's state grass, "pulchra" means "beautiful". This more robust needlegrass is found in many situations—oak woodland, chaparral, and grassland. I love the way it drapes over the brick retaining wall. It grows in the meadow, too; you can tell it from foothill needlegrass by its broader, longer leaves, slightly taller form, and purple color in the seeds.

Mosses

Notes—Eventually I hope to take up a better acquaintance with the world of mosses. I collected the mosses I could see in my garden and gave them to an expert. This is the list I got, but there likely are several more in the garden.



Dicranoweisia cirrata, Dicranoweisia moss



Didymodon vinealis, Didymodon moss



Entosthodon sp., Entosthodon



Orthotrichum diaphanum, White-tipped bristle moss



Scleropodium cespitans, Low scleropodium moss



Tortula muralis, Wall screw-moss

Fungi

Notes—same thing as mosses. An amateur mycologist stopped by one day and identified what we had in the garden. There are doubtless many, more, and it's fun to see what pops up.



Boletus satanus, Satan's bolete



Helvella lacunosa, Fluted black elfin saddle

Turns out these crazy-looking, very distinctive, fungi are edible! "Bland and chewy" said the description. One dinner guest asked, "What wine goes with this? Ripple?"



Lactarius probably *insularis*, Golden milk cap



***Pisolithus tinctorius*, Dead man's foot**

This creepy and rather unmentionably-shaped fungus pops up in the parking strip and under the oak trees. It doesn't seem to do any harm. "pisolithus" literally means "foot rock" (=foot arising from the ground?) and "tinctorius" means "colored". This fungus is used for dyes.



***Agaricus* sp., Field mushroom**

This is the same genus as the common store mushrooms. Maybe they are edible, but I would want to know the species first!



***Hypholoma fasciculare*, Sulfur tuft**