

# GARDENING IN EL DORADO COUNTY: TOP TEN NATIVE PLANTS

Listed below are eight deer resistant plants and two must-have local ornamental beauties for the Sierra foothills of El Dorado County (Sunset Zone 7). Compiled by Rosemary Carey.

**Silver bush lupine (*Lupinus albifrons*)** is a very drought-tolerant



small shrub: it can be a rain-only plant, and is also extremely deer-resistant. Occasional deep summer irrigation will keep more leaves on the plant, but beware of over-watering this chaparral plant as too much water will dramatically shorten its life span. This local native is a beautiful dry bank cover in full sun, especially on nutrient-poor soil, because it has nitrogen-fixing bacteria in root nodules which allow it to pioneer road cuts, rocky soils and even subsoil. From late March to June, nearly foot-long spikes of violet-blue, sweet-pea shaped flowers cover the silver

foliage. It provides seed for ground-feeding birds, especially quail, nectar for hummingbirds, and nectar and pollen for bumblebees. It should be pruned after flowering to counteract its natural legginess and encourage compactness. Located at: Lotus Valley Natives ([www.lotusvalleynatives.com](http://www.lotusvalleynatives.com)).

**Sticky monkeyflower (*Mimulus aurantiacus*)** is another very



drought-tolerant small shrub: it can be a rain-only plant, and is also extremely deer resistant. Occasional deep summer irrigation will prolong the typical May flowering period, sometimes for many months, but beware of over-watering this chaparral plant as too much water will dramatically shorten its life span. This local native is a beautiful as a dry bank cover in full sun, and can also tolerate nutrient-poor soil. Its buff-orange,

funnel-shaped flowers are visited by hummingbirds. It should be pruned after flowering to counteract its natural legginess and encourage compactness. Located at: Cornflower Farms ([www.cornflowerfarms.com](http://www.cornflowerfarms.com)); High Ranch Nursery ([www.hrnursery.com](http://www.hrnursery.com)).



**Cleveland sage (*Salvia clevelandii*)** is a very drought-tolerant medium-sized shrub: it can be a rain-only plant in light shade, and it is very deer resistant, as close to deer proof as one can get. Beware of over-watering this Southern California chaparral plant. This spreading shrub gets 5' tall by 6' broad, with lavender flowers in ball-like clusters. **'Whirly Blue'** and **'Poza Blue'** are hybrids with purple sage (*Salvia clevelandii* x *Salvia leucophylla*) with large clusters of almost-violet blossoms. It is a beautiful dry bank cover in light shade, or with

occasional deep irrigation in full sun. Prune these rapid-growing, brittle shrubs fairly hard in early fall to create a more compact habit and to promote increased flowering. The leaves are very

fragrant. It is an excellent hummingbird plant for its volumes of long-lasting flower displays. It also attracts lots of bumblebees. Cornflower Farms ([www.cornflowerfarms.com](http://www.cornflowerfarms.com)) has both cultivars.



**Deer grass (*Muhlenbergia rigens*)** is a showy and attractive large bunchgrass which may be 3-6' wide and 5' tall in flower. This perennial, warm-season grass has a very symmetrical growth form, radiating out from a single point, and flowing over to touch the ground, with tawny, narrow flower spikes rising straight up above the ottoman-like round mound. This local native is a full sun plant which performs unreliably in the shade. It makes a dramatic specimen, or it can be used in drifts where each plant is given enough room to develop. It is extremely deer-resistant. Located at: Corn-

flower Farms ([www.cornflowerfarms.com](http://www.cornflowerfarms.com)); High Ranch Nursery ([www.hrnursery.com](http://www.hrnursery.com)); Lotus Valley Natives ([www.lotusvalleynatives.com](http://www.lotusvalleynatives.com)); Steve Dowty Nursery ([perigyn@directcon.net](mailto:perigyn@directcon.net)).



**Holly grapes (*Berberis aquifolium* var. *dictyota*, B. *'Golden Abundance'*, B. *nevinii*, and B. *pinnata*)** were formerly in the genus Mahonia, a name still used in the nursery trade and also a common name they still retain. They are medium-sized to large shrubs, which are rhizomatous, and will spread to form thickets. Like the sages, they are very deer resistant, as close to deer proof as one can get. ***Berberis aquifolium* var. *dictyota*** is a local native which are usually less than 3' tall, but may grow as much as 6' high in shade. The brilliant yellow flowers

are showy, and there are purple berries with a pale waxy bloom which attracts birds and mammals. They do best in shade. ***Berberis 'Golden Abundance'*** is a vigorous hybrid selection which grows up to 8' tall and 6-12' wide. The glossy green leaves are divided into thick, spined leaflets that have a reddish midrib. In spring, abundant clusters of yellow flowers are massed on terminal shoots; purple-blue berries follow in fall. Afternoon shade and occasional deep watering produce the most attractive plants. ***Berberis nevinii* (Nevin barberry)** attains 6-8' normally but sometimes as much as 15' in height, and the same range in width. Though only about 2" long, the axillary, yellow flower clusters make a striking display en masse in the spring. The orange-yellow to bright red berries that follow are also quite decorative. It will endure non-irrigated gardens once established, but looks fresher with occasional supplemental water in the summer months. ***Berberis pinnata* (California holly grape or California barberry)** reach 4-8' tall and its slowly creeping rhizomes allow it to form dense drifts over time. In spring, its brightly colored new leaves have bronze, copper and reddish hues. Its upright stems bear 1-2" long clusters of yellow flowers, which are later followed by dark blue autumn berries. It can be planted in full sun with occasional deep summer watering. Two cultivars are available. **'Ken Hartman'** forms broad, lush thickets with stems 4-6' tall. The new leaves are 3-6" long, red, shiny, and strongly crisped. It tends to be a bit straggly when young, but fills in nicely with some pruning. **'Skylark'** has individual stems 6-8' tall. The leaves are 5-9" long,

**California fuchsia (*Epilobium canum* but often still sold under its former name *Zauschneria californica*)** is a summer to fall-flowering subshrub or perennial with bright red tubular flowers.



It is very deer resistant. It is an excellent choice for the hummingbird garden, flowering much later than other hummingbird attractants. Most cultivars are sprawling or mounding. One may buy the species or a cultivar; all are rhizomatous. Here are a few of the many cultivars available: 'Calistoga' grows ~18" tall. It has the largest leaves of any of the selections, reaching 2-3" long and an inch wide. The small red-orange flowers

are never profuse. '**Sierra Salmon**' has an upright growth habit 8-24" tall and equally wide. The narrow leaves are blue-gray and the flowers are salmon-colored. '**Summer Snow**' features broadly triangular, pale green to gray-green leaves and large, wide-open, pure white flowers. It typically reaches 3-12" high and spreads up to 3' or >. Located at: High Ranch Nursery ([www.hrnursery.com](http://www.hrnursery.com)) sells 'Summer Snow'; '**Everett's Choice**' California Fuchsia, (*Epilobium canum* 'Everett's Choice') has a matting growth form, typically reaching 2-4" tall and spreading from 3-5' wide. The flared orange-red flowers appear in profusion. Because it's so short, it should be used in the front of other plants. It is also very drought tolerant. Located at: Cornflower Farms ([www.cornflowerfarms.com](http://www.cornflowerfarms.com)). '**Catalina**' (*Epilobium canum* 'Catalina'): is a rhizomatous (=spreading), late summer and fall flowering upright subshrub which is sometimes sold as *Zauschneria californica* 'Catalina'. This cultivar can grow 2-4' tall in a single season and 5' tall if not cut back hard annually. It has inch-long soft gray leaves and an abundance of orange-red flowers. Located at: Cornflower Farms ([www.cornflowerfarms.com](http://www.cornflowerfarms.com)); Steve Dowty Nursery ([perigyn@directcon.net](mailto:perigyn@directcon.net)) for the species.

**Coyote mint (*Monardella villosa*)** is another very deer resistant small subshrub which has showy dense heads of lavender-pink to purple blossoms and a pungent, mint fragrance.



This compact local native reaches 1-3' high in bloom in late spring and early summer. It is a butterfly plant. Located at: Steve Dowty Nursery ([perigyn@directcon.net](mailto:perigyn@directcon.net)).

**Dwarf coyote brush 'Pigeon Point' (*Baccharis pilularis* 'Pigeon Point')** is a reliable groundcover which has a medium green year-round, grows in a beautifully even habit up to 2' tall and can get more than 6' wide. It's an ideal soil holder with deep roots. It has a lax, undulating habit. Its flowers are inconspicuous but it's a beautiful backdrop to showier



plants: one designer describes it as a member of the chorus, not the star. It's also attractive just by itself. It may be sheared or even mowed as a lawn alternative. On south and west-facing exposures, it needs drip irrigation to become established. Once established, this is a carefree groundcover. It is deer resistant. Cornflower Farms ([www.cornflowerfarms.com](http://www.cornflowerfarms.com)).

**Western Redbud (*Cercis occidentalis*)** is the one of the most



beautiful spring-flowering large shrubs in the Sierra foothills. This local native is a multi-trunked tall shrub which can be pruned to be a **small tree**. It does best with occasional deep watering in summer: at most, deep irrigation every 2-4 weeks after the plants are well-established. Below 2000', it flowers in early April, with glowing rose-purple pea-shaped flowers. Shading significantly reduces flower production. The large, rounded leaves have heart-shaped bases and are notched at the tip. Initially apple green, thin and delicate, the leaves develop a leathery texture as they

age to bluish green. In colder areas, the leaves may have a fall color display of red or yellow leaves before they drop in the fall. It is a beautiful dry bank cover in full sun. It should be caged until it is above browse height, as deer will browse it. Located at: Cornflower Farms ([www.cornflowerfarms.com](http://www.cornflowerfarms.com)); High Ranch Nursery [www.hrnursery.com](http://www.hrnursery.com); Lotus Valley Natives ([www.lotusvalleynatives.com](http://www.lotusvalleynatives.com)).

**Toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*)** is also known as Christmas



Berry or California Holly because of its bright red berries which ripen in late November and December. The berries contrast with the evergreen leaves which are deep green above and bright green below. A large, multi-trunked shrub, it can also be pruned to be a small tree up to 15' high. This local native is a star performer on well-drained banks and hillsides in full sun, and is tolerant of light shade. Excessive shading and retention of moisture around older leaves can lead to foliar diseases. For this reason, plants should be spaced so that they barely touch when mature, generally a

minimum of 8' on center. The hedge-clipping style of pruning should be avoided. It is very drought tolerant, requiring little or no supplemental summer watering depending on exposure, depth and texture of soil; at most, deep irrigation every 2-4 weeks after the plants are well-established. Deer will eat new shoots and leaves if they are accessible, especially in the late summer and fall when green plants are limited. Young plants should be caged until above browse height. A garden must for the wildlife garden: wren-tit, northern flicker, hermit thrush, western bluebird, American robin, northern mockingbird, and cedar waxwing all eat toyon berries. Located at: Cornflower Farms ([www.cornflowerfarms.com](http://www.cornflowerfarms.com)); High Ranch Nursery ([www.hrnursery.com](http://www.hrnursery.com)).



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