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# FOOTHILL-FRIENDLY SHRUBS

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Texture and foliage keep a garden interesting through the seasons. Flowers are just moments of gratification.  
-Kevin Doyle

Shrubs are the bones of the garden. Shrubs define space, provide shelter and give interest as a permanent part of the landscape. In the foothills, fall is the best time of year to plant and establish shrubs.

Before that trip to the nursery decide the function the shrub will fill. Do you want a screen from the road, fall color, blooms, or habitat for wildlife? Next, take a really thorough look at the site. How big is the space? Most shrubs look best if they can grow to the full, mature size with only maintenance pruning.

Choose the shape that best fits the space, tall and narrow, low and mounding, fountain shaped.

## What is the soil like?

Matching the plant soil preferences to the un-amended soil type provides the best opportunity for the plant to thrive. Mineral soil on cut banks take years to improve before planting. Raised beds or mounds are needed on Serpentine soils.

## Get a soil test.

Matching the shrub nutrient requirements and soil pH preferences prevents failure to thrive. Foothill soils range from mildly acid to very acid. Greatly modifying the soil pH levels for the life of the shrub is often unsuccessful; it also has costs to the environment, pocketbook costs, and is a lot of work. Plants are a lot like Goldilocks, everything needs to be just right.

## Other Considerations

Determine the amount of sunlight at the site. Fit the plant light preferences to the site.

Know your cold-hardiness zone. At 1500 feet and higher, the zone is Sunset 7 or USDA zone 8b. Lower elevations are in Sunset zone 9.

Check the fire rating before you plant. Comprehensive lists are available through the Fire-Safe Council of Nevada County and the El Dorado County Fire-Safe Vegetation List of Foothill Natives.

## Establishing Shrubs

The plant tag says, needs no summer water once established. When is that?

Drought tolerant, Mediterranean shrubs grow an extensive root system before putting on much top growth. Don't become discouraged when you don't see much happening for the first two years. Temperate shrubs that require regular water throughout the year have no need for an extensive root system. Plants in this group begin to show top-growth the first year. Establishing shrubs requires irrigation for three to five years. Smaller plants establish more rapidly than larger ones. The last factor to find out about is where the plant grows wild. Many California natives that are available in nurseries are wild in milder climates. In the foothills, they will need summer irrigation. The most foothill friendly shrubs are California natives and those from other Mediterranean areas of the world.

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Foothill climate has cool wet winters and warm to hot dry summers. Look for plants that fit in this natural cycle. The impact on the environment can be reduced by planting climate and soil adapted shrubs.

## Shrubs for Screening

### California Natives

- Coyote brush, *Baccharis pilularis*
- CA spicebush, *Calycanthus occidentalis*
- Deerbrush, *Ceanothus integerrimus*
- Redbud, *Cercus occidentalis*
- Flannelbush, *Fremontodendron californicum*
- Silktassel bush, *Garrya elliptica*
- Toyon, *Heteromeles arbutifolia*
- Coffeeberry, *Rhamnus tomentella*
- Elderberry, *Sambucus mexicana*

### Non-natives

- Strawberry tree, *Arbutus unedo*
- Cotoneaster, *Cotoneaster lacteus*
- Silverberry, *Elaeagnus pungens*
- Crape myrtle, *Lagerstroemia indica*
- Pineapple guava, *Feijoa sellowiana*
- Rosemary grevillea, *Grevillea rosmarinifolia*
- Mahonia, *Mahonia lomariifolia*

## Medium Shrubs

### California Natives

- Oregon grape, *Berberis aquifolium chamaedrys*
- Red osier, *Cornus sericea*
- Ninebark, *Physocarpus capitatus*
- Redberry, *Rhamnus crocea*
- Gooseberry, *Ribes* spp.
- Many varieties California rose, *Rosa californica*
- Styrax, *Styrax officinalis*
- Snowberry, *Symphocarpus rivularis*

### Non-natives

- Barberry, *Berberis linearifolia*
- Mexican orange, *Choisya ternate*
- Heavenly bamboo, *Nandina domestica*
- Rosemary, *rosemarinus officinalis*
- Viburnum, *Viburnum davidii*

## Low Growing Shrubs

### California Natives

- Bearberry, *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*
- Berberis, *Berberis repens*
- Lemon's ceanothus, *Ceanothus lemmonii*
- Bush lupine, *Lupinus* spp.
- Thimbleberry, *Rubus arviflora*
- Snowberry, *Symphocarpus rivularis*

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## Non-native

- Dwarf coyote brush, *Baccharis pilularis* 'Twin Peaks' (cultivar)
- Rockrose, *Cistus salviifolius*
- Rockspray cotoneaster, *Cotoneaster microphyllus*
- Germander, *Teucrium*

Featuring shrubs in the landscape has great rewards. Shrubs provide permanence. Shrubs provide interest throughout the year, whether evergreen or bare in the winter. A landscape featuring well-chosen shrubs provides a tranquil setting that takes care of itself once established. Relax and enjoy.

## References

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