

## Pierce Ranch Road, Davis – about 1-acre with 100% California native plantings

Patricia Carpenter (garden owner and designer)

Richard Guarino (landowner)

Pat Dressendorfer (naturalist and collaborator)

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**Design:** Each area was cleared of weeds for 1-2 years. Planting began in spring of 2005 and a new area added each year until about 2009. New plants are still added. The plantings are roughly grouped into natural communities that include a redwood grove, coastal prairie, valley grassland, woodland, chaparral, and desert areas. The waterway and diversity of habitats attract a variety of wildlife. Plant losses occur because we can't mimic soil and climate from these communities, so we continue to experiment and learn. Many of the plants, including the hedgerow planted to enclose part of the native area, attract numerous beneficial insects.

**Paths:** There are many paths to explore but it is more than fine to step off the paths. Wildflowers like to germinate where the wild animals stomp or disturb the ground. Help us out. The valley grassland was designed without paths to encourage wandering. Many paths have changed over the years.

**Plant list and labels:** Metal plant labels mark the over 300 species and cultivars. But these labels are for our own information as an important garden record, and not specifically for visitors. They are usually tucked under plants and sometimes a bit of water is needed to help make them readable. A plant list is available and a future goal is the mapping of all plants. Just ask us for help if you need to find or identify a plant.

**Water:** Once plants are established, most areas need little water and are watered by rainbird sprinklers. Our desire is to water most of the drought tolerant areas 0-4 times each summer if they have had adequate winter/spring rains. We aim for deep watering, but less often. The redwood areas are watered once every week or two in summer with an inch of water. The hedgerow was on drip irrigation but now the drought tolerant, established shrubs are not watered in summer unless needed. During the drought years we tried to water in spring to simulate the typical rain pattern. Most plants survived the drought as well as 5 years of Patricia's absence, with our greatest losses in 2016. The slough often floods with winter rains – in early 2017, rising to cover the bridge walkway.

### Maintenance

- Nothing is taken out of the garden - All weeds, clippings, sticks, branches, etc. are put back on the ground. Aggressive weeds are put in the path in 4 areas where we walk all the time so we can keep an eye on them reseeding. Dead trees and shrubs are left to create habitat.
- Mulch vs annual wildflowers - Mulching with woodchips helps keep weeds under control but annual wildflowers won't germinate well, as most need non-mulched winter soil. A difficult choice!
- Weeds - Control is ongoing with hand pulling, stirrup hoe, mulches, close planting and occasional spraying.
- Clean-up - Our goal is to NOT work too much—this wild escape is to enjoy! We now do one of three methods of clean up. One is to mimic nature and do nothing. The second is to help nature along each year by pulling, breaking, or stomping to the ground the old stems and leaves of some sub-shrubs, perennials, grasses and annuals. Remember, elk and deer used to graze, stomp and browse. Lastly, we do cut back some plants to the ground and prune and shape a few trees and shrubs.
- Time spent - In general, maintenance requires about 30-40 hours per month, varying throughout the year.
- Sticks - Used to mark new or at risk plants, and keep people and pests off.
- Pests - These include rabbits, turkeys, mice and rats, gophers, squirrels, voles, birds, and slugs. Cages and trays protect plants from rabbits and birds and big juicy weeds are often left in open areas to entice them. Sticks help keep turkeys from digging up new plants. Baits are used for mice, rats and slugs.
- Flags - These are used for communication and a temporary maintenance aid.
- Yellow = Caution!! We mark new or vulnerable plants and seeded areas until plants are well established.
- Blue = Water issues. New plants might need extra water. Blue flags also identify irrigation problems.
- Red = Major problem!! Maybe a weed or a plant that needs editing, etc.

**Propagation:** Bit by bit we are learning how to grow and propagate native plants by letting nature take over or helping the process along. Seeds, plant divisions and volunteer seedlings are used to re-vegetate new areas.

**Compost Toilet:** This can be found in the redwood grove to the west.