



July/August 1992

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**Insignis** Newsletter of the Alta Peak Chapter  
California Native Plant Society

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Welcome to **Insignis**. This newsletter is printed on recycled paper. If you do not save your **Insignis**, we encourage you to share it with a friend or recycle it again.

### Calendar of Events

- July 25 Field Trip: Wildflower Walk - Giant Forest, Sequoia National Park  
Sat. 10-4 pm Meet at Giant Forest Village Market
- September 10 Chapter Board Meeting  
Thurs. 7 pm Cort Gallery
- September 12-13 CNPS Statewide Quarterly Meeting and Conservation Workshop  
Sat./Sun. Sacramento
- September 26 Chapter Meeting with Pot-Luck Dinner - The Care of Oaks in your Backyard  
Sat. 7 pm Cort Gallery Ginger Strong, Arborist, City of Visalia
- October 3-4 Plant Sale - East Bay Chapter  
Sat./Sun 10-2 pm Merritt College Horticultural Area, Oakland  
Largest native plant sale in California! Possible field trip, anyone interested?

### Field Trip: Wildflower Walk - Giant Forest, Sequoia National Park

On July 25, we'll escape the Valley heat and explore the summer wildflowers in the coolness of Giant Forest, in Sequoia National Park. We'll meet at 10 am at the Giant Forest Village Market and travel from there to Crescent Meadow, where we will explore the wildflowers inhabiting montane meadow, riparian, and sequoia-mixed conifer habitats. We'll hike out to Tharp's Log- a stroll familiar to many- but we'll pay special attention to wildflowers you may have missed during previous visits. The hike will be about two miles, with gentle grades, at about 6500' elevation. Bring lunch, water, sunscreen, bug repellent, hat, plant ID books, and a hand lens. Anyone wishing to carpool from the Cort Gallery should call Cathy Cort at 561-4671.

### Be Involved!

The success of the Alta Peak Chapter depends on you, its members. Like any non-profit volunteer organization, we depend on dues-paying members to financially support the chapter. Even more importantly, though, we depend on active, involved individuals to participate in chapter activities and projects. The height of commitment is represented by those who volunteer to serve on the chapter board of directors.

The work of the California Native Plant Society is important. By becoming involved in this chapter, you can help to preserve native landscapes, both locally and statewide. We encourage all of you to participate to the fullest extent possible, and experience the personal rewards of contributing your skills and energy to this cause.

Encourage your friends to join - this chapter, serving all of Tulare County, currently has only 53 members. Attend chapter activities, and consider serving on the board of directors. Your help will be gratefully accepted!

## Summer Native Plant Landscaping

by John Moore, Native Plant Landscaping Chair

Upon contemplating the imposing stature of many of the mature California native plants, the homeowner may wonder where in his backyard to place a valley oak that may grow to 75,' or a fast growing *Ceanothus* that may quickly attain 10' in height. Yet there exists an array of perennial and small shrubs from our state's varied plant communities that can be incorporated into our gardens, and may serve to remind us of the distinctive beauty of the California landscape. The adaptability of many of these native plants to our dry summer/wet winter Mediterranean climate allows them to play a part in appropriate horticulture for our water-thirsty state.

In late summer when many native plants are in their sun bleached dormancy, the bright red tubular flowers of the California fuchsia (*Zauschneria* sp.) attract the attention of travelers and hummingbirds alike. Very adaptable both in the garden and in uncultivated locales, this plant can tolerate extremes of hot and cold, wet and dry. The genus shows remarkable diversity. For example, in the Kaweah River drainage, *Zauschneria* species with gray, narrow leaves can be found growing in cracks in rocks along the river at low elevations (700') and at higher elevations (above 7000'), plants have greener, oval leaves. Forming spreading carpets of foliage, California fuchsia normally grows 12" to 24" tall. The foliage dies back in the winter but new shoots emerge from the ground early in the spring. In the garden the plants benefit from cutting them back to near ground level in December/January. Volunteer plants will come from seed but seedlings are easily removed if not desired. New plants are obtained from seed, cuttings, or divisions. Selections with white or pink flowers are available in the nursery trade but the vibrant red show of the August and September blooms are especially memorable.

The woody shrubs of the *Mimulus* genus (occasionally referred to as *Diplacus*) are covered with bright yellow flowers locally in May and can be seen growing on the rocky road cuts in the vicinity of Lake Kaweah. The face-like appearance of the flower has contributed the common name of monkey flower to this genus. Many species are found in the state, and hybrids have been made that produce flower colors ranging from white, yellow, red, mahogany, pink and many shades in between. In our hot, interior climate, monkey flowers do best with moderate moisture and afternoon shade and typically reach a height of 24" to 30". By late summer the plants may go dormant if you let them dry up (as I do in my garden), but with the return of cooler weather and rain in the fall, there will be vigorous new shoots. It's a good idea to cut back monkey flower plants in the garden by 50% during this late summer dormant period. Propagation is easy by sowing the very fine seed, and if you come up with your own "special hybrid", you can multiply it by making cuttings!

Penstemons are really a subject unto themselves due to the diverse number of species found in California (58) and indeed the entire United States. Strong root systems allow penstemons to thrive in barren, gravelly soils. Their reputation as temperamental or short-lived plants is due to their requirement for well drained soil. In planting penstemons, make sure that water will not stand around the crown of the plant. Flower colors range from white, blue, purple, red, to bright lavender. *Penstemon heterophyllus*, a local mid-elevation species, is available in the nursery trade and is low growing (12" to 24") with evergreen foliage and flowers in shades of blue-purple. Commonly seen at higher elevations (5000' and up) is *Penstemon newberryi*, which lights up rocky ledges with its bright rose-lavender flowers this month. Also seen at that elevation, especially in shady glens, are the red flowers of *Penstemon centranthifolius*. These two higher elevation species are a little tougher to grow at lower elevations, so some shade is recommended. Penstemons can be grown from seed or cuttings. It is suggested that flower stalks be cut back and removed when blooming is complete.

Next time: with California plants, fall is time for planting!

## 1992 Youth Poster Contest Winners

Nine hundred posters were submitted in the annual statewide youth poster contest with the theme "California: Plants in Danger!" Four of the forty award-winning posters came from Three Rivers! We congratulate the following winners: grades K-1, 1st place - **Ron Zirkles**, 3rd place - **Russell Seeley**, honorable mention - **Jenny Denis**; grades 7-8, honorable mention - **Holly Tucker**. Special appreciation is given to **Pearl Tucker**, Education Chair, for assisting in presenting the poster contest to the school. We are especially proud that Three Rivers did so well, since this is only the first time students from this area have entered the contest. Sometime this fall, all forty of the winning posters will be displayed at Three Rivers Union School. Board members who saw the posters at the quarterly CNPS meeting in Mendocino report that "they were fantastic." This will be a very special exhibition, so stay tuned for more information.

## Giant Sequoia Symposium - A Gathering of Facts, Ideas, and Observations

by Catherine Cort

(As we go to press, rumors are flying that President Bush will visit Sequoia National Forest during the week of July 13 to proclaim a national monument for sequoia groves in the forest.)

A symposium on the giant sequoia was held in Visalia on June 23-25 in Visalia, California. Coordinated by UC Davis Extension Service, this symposium covered all aspects of the Giant Sequoia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*), with information presented by the US Forest Service, California Department of Forestry, Save-the-Redwoods League, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, National Audubon Society, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Tule River Tribal Council.

Perhaps we should call *Sequoiadendron giganteum* the largest rare plant in Tulare County. It has been suggested that some individual specimen trees be given rare plant status because there are only about seventy-five trees with diameters greater than twenty feet out of five thousand individual trees in seventy-five groves. These groves vary in size from one acre to 4000 acres, covering 36,000 acres in the western Sierra Nevada. Ninety percent of these groves are located on public land. The small cones of the sequoia are of the closed type and can stay green on the tree for 15-20 years. A mature tree produces about 1500 cones a year with only 1% eventually producing a tree. There are 90,000 seeds per pound. Fifty percent of all trees currently growing were already established in the 1800's.

The first white man saw a sequoia in 1852 in the Calaveras Grove. Less than 150 years later, only 10% of virgin forests remain in the United States. California uses 10 million board feet of lumber a year, importing 60% of this wood mostly from Oregon, Washington and British Columbia. One speaker called California "the world's worst unnecessary wood imperialist," and challenged California to invest in timber farming, as is practiced in New Zealand.

Part of the discussion on the control burn issue focused on "visual ecology," which implies a relationship between human use and biology. This issue still creates controversy, and management agencies are learning as they go, basing their decisions on ongoing scientific studies.

Giant sequoias inspire awe in those who see them. Not only are individual trees ancient and mighty, but giant sequoias once occupied a much larger area than they do today. Groves were once found throughout Europe, Greenland, and the east coast of the US. Native Americans called these trees the "Ancient Ones." A creation legend is told by local Native Americans on the Tule River Reservation. This story says the bald eagle is the creator of all things, and that he lived in a tree that grew in heaven. When he had finished creating all the earth, the animals and plants, the tree in heaven came down to earth as the first tree. Was this the giant sequoia?

Our human mind has evolved in wilderness and unknowing, and the giant Sequoia records much of that evolution in its numerous tree rings, now being extensively studied by scientists. These big trees are our teachers and I don't think it is only sentimentality that creates the public perception that these trees are sacred objects.

## Plant Community Training Workshop

A workshop for training CNPS chapters in how to describe rare plant communities in their areas was held on June 20 at the James Reserve in the San Bernardino National Forest of Southern California. Mike Neuman, Alta Peak chapter Plant Communities chair, learned a standardized sampling procedure for describing vegetation in a way that will permit consistent classification by CNPS members. Later this fall, Mike will hold a training session so that Alta Peak chapter members can begin describing rare plant communities of Tulare County.

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### Insignis Newsletter, CNPS

c/o Catherine Cort

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