

The SCHS monthly webinar in November featured Dennis Mudd, a self-taught native plant gardener who founded the Calscape website in 2010 with the goal of enabling small scale nature restoration efforts in California. Mudd talked about how he wanted his own garden to mimic the wild spaces he loved and that inspired him throughout San Diego county where he lives. He began developing the website to provide native plant enthusiasts like himself with a resource that would show which plants are likely to be native to any location in the state. The site also enables users to create plant lists and research nurseries as well as other resources to obtain specific plants, plus it provides growing information.

As an avid mountain biker, Mudd wanted to mimic the look of the wild spaces he loved seeing while biking throughout San Diego county. He spoke about the “trial and error” process he personally went through in creating his garden, and his presentation focused on the lessons he learned from building it and the Calscape website.

Mudd’s presentation showed not only the before & after transformation of his garden, including mistakes made early on, but also reviewed the processes he undertook to recreate nature through biomimicry. He covered plant selection, irrigation, mulching, weed and pest control practices, and shared photos of the native plants he grows and the associated wildlife that is attracted to his built environment.

Early efforts included having a landscaper put in a “native” garden before Mudd knew a lot about California’s flora, resulting in a drought-tolerant plant palette comprised of many plants native to South Africa and Australia. Mudd oversaw the next phase of planting, which incorporated lots of California native cultivars selected for their aesthetic value, many of which were not adapted to his area and eventually died. These lessons led him to focus on the plants which did survive and flourish, and to eventually expand his plant palette to include more of those, as well as related species that were appropriate to the conditions of his site.

In addition to discovering which of the more than 8,000 plants native to California were best-suited to his garden, Mudd found

that this type of landscape was also easier to manage and that it supported a large amount of biodiversity. These insights led him to establish the Calscape website, with one of its goals being to encourage traditional gardeners to give nature restoration landscaping a try by making the entire process easier, regardless of where they lived in California. His ultimate aim is that homeowners who restore nature in their gardens can slow, and one day even reverse, the loss of biodiversity being caused by widespread development in California, one of the major contributors to the destruction of approximately 100 acres of natural habitat every day.

Some of the observations Mudd shared from his personal experiences included learning about the relationship between mycorrhizae and plant health; adjusting his irrigation practices to mimic nature by creating catch basins and a seasonal creek to capture rainwater which plants can access during the dry seasons, and bioswales to direct water flow; allowing mature plants to create their own mulch, thereby improving soil health; and the need to eliminate fertilizers and avoid chemical weed killers. He also learned that natural insect control was a direct result of these practices, by allowing his plant selections to attract birds and insect predators that keep pest populations in check, while also supporting butterfly and other pollinator activities.

Highlights of Mudd’s garden included information about the conversion of his chlorinated swimming pool into a “natural” pond which now supports aquatic life and attracts passing waterfowl; photos of the diversity of wildlife his garden supports including great horned owls and various raptors in addition to songbirds and butterflies (all part of a co-evolved food chain that began with his choice of plants); and many pictures of the great variety of plants he grows on his two-acre property.

In addition to the personal satisfaction Mudd’s garden – located in Poway – has provided him, he also won the San Diego Home and Garden’s Garden of the Year Award in 2014. That same year he donated Calscape to the California Native Plant Society, but continued leading development of the site in partnership with CNPS and the Jepson eFlora group at UC Berkeley

until 2019. Calscape is currently the largest California native plant website with over two million unique users. In addition to the website, his favorite recommendations for gardeners are: *California Native Plants for the Garden* by Carol Bornstein, David Fross and Bart O’Brien; *Bringing Nature Home* by Douglas W. Tallamy; and the international website www.iNaturalist.org.

Mudd’s program and beautiful home garden provided much food for thought for gardeners considering using California native plants as they work on their own fall planting. For inspiration and tips, you can review his presentation and other helpful videos by visiting the SCHS archives on our YouTube channel.

 Sabine Steinmetz

To watch this program on YouTube, click the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eilqQPUR3a4>

SCHS MONTHLY GARDEN SHARE

As your garden enters winter dormancy, allow yourself to slow down a little too...

- Complete your fall clean-up
- Continue with new plantings, so perennials can establish healthy roots during dormancy
 - Cut back on irrigation
- Finish putting in spring bulbs and sowing wildflower seeds
- Keep on adding to your cool-season vegetable patch
- Late in the month, begin rose pruning and planting

WE WISH YOU & YOUR GARDEN A HAPPY & HEALTHY NEW YEAR!

 Sabine Steinmetz

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