

# Fall & Winter Maintenance Tips for your **Native Habitat Garden**



With the rain and cooler weather, Fall is the **perfect time of year to plant** native herbaceous perennials and shrubs, and sow annual wildflower seeds in your habitat garden. **Native plant nurseries** in Sonoma County where you can purchase plants include:

- California Flora Nursery
- California Native Plant Society Nursery at the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation Environmental Center (host Fall and Spring plant sales)
- Hallberg Butterfly Nursery (by appointment only)
- Emerisa Gardens Nursery
- Devil Mountain Nursery
- Harmony Farm Supply & Nursery
- Home Grown Habitat Nursery

**Maintaining your school habitat garden with your students is also a great way to teach ecological literacy and stewardship.** As learners engage with and care for natural habitats, they also develop their own identity within ecological relations. By acting as stewards, students are empowered with a sense of belonging and responsibility – deepening their understanding of the world around them, and their ability to participate in and influence it.

Fall maintenance tasks include:

- **Marking the location of plants** that have gone or are going dormant (such as milkweed) with stakes to protect the area.
- Lightly **top dressing your garden with compost** to improve soil structure and support a healthy soil food web.
- **Adding a few inches of wood bark mulch** over the compost to help suppress weeds and hold water in the soil.
- If it's not raining, **watering your habitat garden deeply** every 1-2 weeks. Specific watering needs will depend on your plants, soil, rain and sunlight, but generally natives require less frequent, deeper waterings that encourage their roots to grow and expand.
- **Try letting things go a little wild!** Letting flowers go to seed to provide food for birds, and leaving dead leaves and stalks to shelter over-wintering insects. It's usually best to wait until the Spring to weed your garden – once it's consistently above 50°F during the day – to allow any hibernating or growing insects to emerge from the leaf litter and dead stems that they have been living in over the Winter.
- **Considering a life-cycle approach** by creating and leaving spaces for insects, pollinators, and birds to **hibernate, nest, and reproduce**. This can mean leaving some **areas free of mulch** for ground-nesting insects, dispersing bundles of hollow stems as **shelter and habitat** for cavity nesting bees (making sure to refresh the stems in “bee hotels” annually), and providing caterpillar **pupation sites** under trees using a fallen log or leaf litter. It's also good to ensure your garden has spaces with **year-round protective cover** for birds and small wildlife using evergreen trees or shrubs, logs, rocks, or brush piles.