

Home & Garden

Magic that is spring will soon explode in gardens

By Mayita Dinos
At the writing of this column, and despite the unusually cool weather, I sense that spring is quickly approaching. I know this to be true on many levels.

It is my daily perusals in the garden that tell me with irrefutable candor that the magic that is spring in Southern California is soon to explode around us, and it promises to be a spectacular one! If you don't believe me, take a walk in the Santa Monica Mountains.

Last year, I converted my front yard into a garden that walks my walk and talks my talk of "climate appropriate gardens" philosophy. The vast majority of plants in my new garden are native to the Coastal Sage Scrub Community. That is the designation given to our area, which includes Culver City (where I live) and Hancock Park (where you live).

In fact, most of the population of California lives in this soft chaparral, which most people erroneously call "a desert." The Coastal Sage Scrub plant community exists along the coast of California, roughly from San Francisco down to San Diego. These plants are perfectly suited to the hot, dry summers and cool wet winters that define the Mediterranean climate we live in. In the summertime, they conserve energy and water by resting, or



RAIN CHAIN captures water from the roof which is then channeled into a dry stream and allowed to slowly percolate into the soil.

aestivating, as horticulturists like to say. (I wish I could do the same!) In the winter, the rains wake up the aestivating plants and trigger new growth and bloom.

In my garden, I see fresh new basal growth appearing out of the soil and threading its way up toward the sky in my California sagebrush, California rose, and lotus plants. Flattened bulges will soon burst open in bloom on the Pacific Coast irises I bought at the Rancho Santa Ana plant sale. Lacey, grey-green leaved poppies have appeared with bunches of nodding bundles of fiery blooms.

The hummingbird sage is setting big thick rosey buds of what will be "no-way-could-nature-make-up-a-color-like-this" magenta blooms! The thick waxy leaves of the cho-

rus of sages are appearing, and on the occasional hot day release their intoxicating oily fragrance.

This re-birth and all its glory are brought about by the winter rains. Luckily, we had a bounty of rain this year. I celebrate the rain in my garden by capturing it from the roof onto a rain chain, which literally sings when it rains! The water is channeled into a dry stream and allowed to slowly percolate into the soil around various large shrubs and trees. Those plants have never done as well, thanks to this deep, natural soaking.

That walk in the Santa Monica Mountains I suggested will show you many of the plants I have mentioned, as well as immense carpets of showy California wildflowers. With the exception of the poppies, I haven't been successful yet in introducing them into my own garden. I'm still grappling with yearly dumpings of

seeds from my Chinese elm. I smother them with mulch, which makes sowing wildflower seeds a bit untenable.

As the weather warms up, I will start to take my meals out in the garden so I can be entertained by the flurry of activity that ensues. The native carpenter bees will bumble about in a seemingly unpredict-

able way, the skippers in the meadow will burst into flight sending specks of color darting through the grasses, and the hummingbirds will perch quietly overhead to catch their breath in the tiny stems of the elm.

It doesn't get much better than this.

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