

Some Common Plants at Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (Little Green Heron and Blue Heron Trails area)

Western Sycamore *Platanus racemosa*

Plant type: Tree Max. height: 115ft.

Western Sycamore (*Platanus racemosa*) is a California native and is the dominant species in the worldwide endangered sycamore-alluvial woodland habitat. Its fruits feed many small birds, some mammals eat its twigs and bark, and its flowers are important to the Western Tiger Swallowtail butterfly, other butterflies and hummingbirds. The Western Sycamore is a deciduous tree that needs moisture. It can be planted as a landscape tree to showcase its beautiful multi-colored bark.

Valley Oak *Quercus lobata*

Plant type: Tree Max. height: 60-100ft.

The largest of North American oaks, the Valley Oak (*Quercus lobata*) grows in the rich, deep soils of California valleys, its roots reaching for required year-round ground water. Valley Oaks have been known to live for 600 years. Its acorns provide food for a variety of mammals and birds including the acorn woodpecker and California ground squirrel. In a formal study it was found that migratory songbirds prefer the native Valley Oaks as foraging stopover sites compared to other trees. It is hoped that more people will plant Valley Oaks in the landscape as these elegant and valuable trees are becoming more scarce in nature.

Willow *Salix sp.*

Plant type: Trees/Shrubs Max. height: 6in.-70ft.

Willow (*Salix sp.*) growing along stream borders can protect the bank against erosion while providing habitat for various wildlife. Willow has been used since ancient times to make baskets, fish traps, fences and house walls. There are approximately 400 species of Willow. All willows grow close to streams and other water sources.

Perennial Plants

A perennial plant or simply perennial is a plant that lives more than two years. The term (per- + -ennial, "through the years") is often used to differentiate a plant from shorter-lived annuals and biennials. The term "perennial" is also widely used to distinguish plants with little or no woody growth from trees and shrubs, which are also technically perennials. Perennials, especially small flowering plants, that grow and bloom over the spring and summer, die back every autumn and winter, and then return in the spring from their rootstock, are known as *herbaceous perennials* or *perennial herbs*.

California Mugwort *Aresmisia douglasiana*

Plant type: Perennial herb Max. height: 3-6ft.

The whole plant has a pleasant, pungent odor. It has two quite different appearances. In the spring deeply incised leaves are lush green and wooly underneath. As summer advances, the deep-cut leaves give way to small entire leaves. Mugwort is a common native usually found growing near streams and marshes.

Mugwort has also been used by pioneers and others to flavor beer before the introduction of hops. Many species of mugwort exist worldwide and most were used for cooking, flavoring and medicine

Many local tribes thought highly of this plant. It was a symbol of peace and the juice was used to soothe skin irritations. Mugwort is still used today by local tribes in traditional ceremonies.

Common Yarrow *Achillea millefolium*

Plant type: Perennial herb Max. height: 1-3ft.

Common Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), with its delicate-looking feathery foliage, is a hardy plant found all over California. Its flowers are a pollen source for bees, butterflies, and ladybugs, and many species of moth larvae feed on it. It is found that several cavity-nesting birds line their nests with Common Yarrow leaves to reduce parasites. Native American tribes across the continent used Common Yarrow as medicine.

Hummingbird Sage *Salvia spathacea*

Plant type: Perennial herb Max. height: 1-3ft.

A very drought tolerant and highly aromatic perennial, Hummingbird Sage (*Salvia spathacea*) grows best in partly shaded areas. Deer and gophers will avoid this plant, but it does attract grizzly bears, which are extinct in California. As the name implies, this sage is attractive to hummingbirds and beneficial pollinating species.

Narrow Leaf Milkweed *Asclepias fascicularis*

Plant type: Perennial herb Max. height: 1.7-3.3ft.

Narrow Leaf Milkweed (*Asclepias fascicularis*) can be found growing wild in the Western United States and Baja California. It is a host plant for the Monarch butterfly, and the Monarch caterpillars eat the foliage. Therefore, in a home landscape is helpful to plant a number of milkweeds close together to give monarch caterpillars an adequate amount to eat. Narrow Leaf Milkweed is easily grown and drought tolerant as well.

California Poppy *Eschscholzia californica*

Plant type: Annual herb Max. height: .5-2ft.

The California state flower since 1890, visitors to the California coast in the 1800s described the "golden" hills that were blanketed in California Poppies (*Eschscholzia californica*). The pollen-rich blooms attract native bees and honey bees as well as butterflies. Indigenous peoples used the California Poppy for food and medicine.

Slender Buckwheat *Eriogonum gracile*

Plant type: Annual herb Max. height: 1-2ft

Slender Buckwheat (*Eriogonum gracile*) grows in dry sandy or clay soils and is a major food source for various butterfly species larval stage.

Broadleaf Cattail *Typha latifolia*

Plant type: Perennial herb Max. height: 1-5ft.

The native Broadleaf Cattail (*Typha latifolia*) stands at Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge appeared on their own from wind dispersing the seeds. Broadleaf Cattails do provide food and shelter for different marsh-dwelling animals. They provide nesting sites for red-winged blackbirds, ducks and geese and shelter spots for fish to lay eggs. Muskrats and beavers enjoy the shoots and roots of Broadleaf Cattail, while teal ducks, finches and least bitterns eat the seeds.

This plant is also known to absorb pollutants. The tender shoots and roots of cattail are edible, but care must be taken to ensure that pollutants have not been absorbed into the plant.

Coyote Brush *Baccharis pilularis*

Plant type: Shrub Max. height: 1.5-10ft.

Coyote Brush (*Baccharis pilularis*) can be planted as a fast growing and drought tolerant hedge. The Coyote Brush is of great importance in ecological restoration, as it is one of the first plants to reappear in areas where the vegetation was removed by disturbance, such as a bulldozer, fire, grazing or tilling, and thus provides food and shelter for many creatures and protection for small seedlings of other plant varieties.

Grasses

All grasses are fleshy plants with hollow stems. The stems are closed at intervals, called "nodes." Parallel veined leaves appear alternately on opposite sides of the stem. Grasses are the most abundant and widespread plants in California. Grasses cover almost 1/3 of the land area of the earth! Cereals such as wheat, oats, barley, corn and rice are all grasses.

Bunch Grass *Carex pansa*

Plant type: Grasses Max. height: .7-1.3ft.

This perennial native grass grows in large clumps up to 2 feet tall and was an important food source for the antelope and elk that once roamed this area in great herds. Bunch Grass (*Carex pansa*) can be planted as a lawn substitute but cannot withstand high foot traffic. It is a deer resistant native that would need trimming only 2-3 times per year and has a moderate to low water requirement.

Sedges:

Sedges are grass like in appearance, but have solid rather than hollow stems and unlike grasses, the base of each leaf completely enclosed the stem. Stems are usually triangular. They grow in moist or wet areas. Two common sedges are Santa Barbara Sedge and the Common Tule.

Santa Barbara Sedge *Carex barbarae*

Plant type: Sedge Max. height: 1.6-3.3ft.

Santa Barbara Sedge (*Carex barbarae*), a native of California and Oregon, is often used in riparian restoration. Its vigorous root system helps to filter water and stabilize soil. It prefers moist areas, is deer resistant and makes a handsome container plant. Home gardeners consider it invasive, if growing a garden landscape.

Common Tule *Schoenoplectus acutus var. occidentalis*

Plant type: Sedge Max. height: 13ft.

Common Tules (*Schoenoplectus acutus var. occidentalis*) are native to freshwater marshes all over North America. Common Tules growing along shorelines have an important ecological role as wind and water buffers and therefore acting to shelter other plants and reduce erosion. Native Americans used Common Tules in the making of baskets, bowls, mats, hats, clothing, boats and houses. The seeds and roots of these plants are eaten by waterfowl, and the dense stands provide nesting sites.

Rushes

Rushes grow in wet or moist places in clumps usually 2-4 feet tall. Stems are round and unjointed and may be hollow or pithy. Though rushes may look like grass, an easy distinction to observe is the joints in grass stems and the lack of joints in rush stems.

Common Rush *Juncus patens*

Plant type: Rush Max. height: 1-3ft.

Considered historically uninteresting by botanists, the Common Rush (*Juncus patens*) is actually far from it. This unassuming plant has tremendous value in providing erosion control and soil stabilization, particularly in areas that flood periodically. The matrix of the plant's rhizomes (its creeping rootstock system) is beneficial in the filtering treatment of water. A wide range of birds and mammals eat the seeds or rootstock of common rush, including waterfowl, songbirds, jack rabbits, cottontail, muskrat, porcupine and gophers. Wading birds and amphibians find shelter among the stems. .

The genus name "*Juncus*" means to bind and Native Americans used Common Rush in making baskets, mats and twine.

"Sedges have edges, rushes are round, and grasses have joints and leaves all around" is a useful memory jogger.