

Plants for Vegetated Swales

Swales are shallow channels designed to catch rainwater and reduce or prevent its flow off the site. Swales planted with appropriate vegetation are known as bioswales. They promote infiltration of rainwater into the soil and help filter and breakdown pollutants in the stormwater runoff. Bioswales can also add beauty and value to the landscape. This plant list features mostly California native species that are suitable for many vegetated swales.



For a more extensive list of plants appropriate for stormwater treatment features, see Appendix B of the Alameda County Clean Water Program's publication, "C.3 Stormwater Technical Guidance: A Handbook for Developers, Builders and Project Applicants," May 14, 2013, which can be downloaded from www.cleanwaterprogram.org/resources/resources-development.html.

Botanical Name	Common Name	CA Native	Sun/ Soil	Height	Spread	Water Requirement	Reference	Comments
Emergent Plants (can grow in water with part of the plant above the surface)								
<i>Carex barbarae</i>	Santa Barbara sedge	●	Full sun or part shade	1-3'	1-3'	Moderate/Little-None	WUCOLS/Sunset	
<i>Carex obnupta</i>	Slough sedge	●	Full sun or part shade	1-3'	1-3'	Moderate	WUCOLS	
<i>Juncus effusus</i>	Pacific rush	●	Sun to part shade	1-2'	1-2'	High	WUCOLS	
<i>Juncus patens</i>	Blue rush	●	Sun to part shade	1-2'	1-2'	High/Drought Tolerant	WUCOLS/ CNP	
Plants That Tolerate Periodic Inundation								
<i>Acer macrophyllum</i>	Big leaf maple	●	Sun to part shade	30-100'	30-100'	Occasional-Regular	CNP	
<i>Acer negundo californicum</i>	Box elder	●	Full sun or part shade	30-50'	30-50'	Moderate	WUCOLS	
<i>Aesculus californica</i>	Buckeye	●	Full sun	15-20'	30'	Very Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Alnus rubra</i>	Red alder	●	Sun or shade	45-50'	20-30'	Regular/Ample	Sunset	
<i>Cercocarpus betuloides</i>	Mountain mahogany	●	Full sun/Tolerates clay and serpentine	5-12'	5-12'	Very Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Carex divulsa (tumulicola)</i>	Berkeley sedge	●	Part sun to part shade	1-2'	1-2'	Moderate-Occasional	WUCOLS	
<i>Carex pansa</i>	California meadow sedge	●	Sun to shade	1'	1'	Moderate/Drought Tolerant	WUCOLS/ CNP	
<i>Carex subfusca</i>	Rusty sedge	●	Sun to shade	1-1.5'	1-1.5'	Moderate/Drought Tolerant	WUCOLS/ CNP	
<i>Cornus sericea</i>	Western dogwood	●	Sun to shade	15'	15'	Occasional-Regular	CNP	Forms large thickets
<i>Cornus stolonifera</i>	Redosier dogwood	●	Full sun or light shade	7-9'	12'	Regular	Sunset	Forms large thickets
<i>Chondropetalum tectorum</i>	Cape rush	●	Sun to part sun	4-6'	4-6'	Moderate-Occasional	EBMUD	
<i>Crocosmia 'Lucifer'</i>	Crocosmia	●	Sun, some shade when hot	4'	2'	Regular	Sunset	
<i>Deschampsia cespitosa</i>	Tufted hairgrass	●	Part shade	1-2'	2'	Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Dietes bicolor, D. iridioides</i>	Fortnight lily	●	Sun or part shade	3'	3'	Occasional-None	EBMUD	
<i>Elymus glaucus</i>	Blue wild rye	●	Full to part sun	1-2'	2'	Low	WUCOLS	Can be invasive
<i>Equisetum hyemale</i>	Horsetail	●	Full sun or partial shade	4'	2'	High	WUCOLS	Can be invasive in wet areas
<i>Festuca californica</i>	California fescue	●	Sun to part shade	1-2'	2-3'	Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Festuca idahoensis</i>	Idaho fescue	●	Full sun to part sun	1-2'	1-2'	Very Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Festuca rubra</i>	Red fescue	●	Full sun to part sun	3-12"	1'	Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Festuca rubra 'molate'</i>	Molate fescue	●	Full sun to part sun	3-12"	1'	Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Leymus triticoides</i>	Creeping wild rye	●	Full sun to part sun	1-3'	1-2'	Occasional	EBMUD	
<i>Lotus scoparius</i>	Deerweed	●	Full sun to part shade	3'	3'	Very Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Muhlenbergia rigens</i>	Deergrass	●	Full sun to part shade	3'	3'	Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Myrica californica</i>	Wax myrtle	●	Sun or part shade	10-30'	10-30'	Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Nassella lepida</i>	Foothill needlegrass	●	Full sun/Good drainage	1'	1'	Very Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Nassella pulchra</i>	Purple needlegrass	●	Full sun/Good drainage	1-2'	1-2'	Very Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Physocarpus capitatus</i>	Pacific ninebark	●	Sun or shade	8'	8'	Moderate-Regular	Sunset	
<i>Platanus racemosa</i>	Western sycamore	●	Full sun	30-80'	20-50'	Moderate	WUCOLS	
<i>Populus fremontii</i>	Fremont cottonwood	●	Sun/Moisture-retentive	50-70'	50'	Occasional- Regular	CNP	
<i>Quercus lobata</i>	Valley oak	●	Sun/Adaptable	100'	100'	Low	WUCOLS	

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<i>Rosa californica</i>	California wild rose	●	Part shade	3'	6'	Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Salix lasiolepis</i>	Arroyo willow	●	Sun	6-9'	9-12'	High	WUCOLS	
<i>Salix laevigata</i>	Red willow	●	Sun	9-30'	9-30'	High	WUCOLS	
<i>Sambucus mexicana</i>	Elderberry	●	Sun to partial shade	8-25'	8-25'	Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Sisyrinchium bellum</i>	Blue-eyed grass	●	Full sun to light shade	6-12"	6-18"	Very Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Stipa arundinacea</i>	Tall fescue		Full sun	2'	2'	Moderate-Occasional	EBMUD	Potentially invasive
Upland Plants (for the swale's upland zone/top of slope)								
<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	Common yarrow		Full sun/Reasonable drainage	12-30"	2-4'	Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Adenostema fasciculatum</i>	Chamise	●	Sun/Adaptable except alkaline	6-15'	6-15'	Drought Tolerant	CNP	
<i>Arctostaphylos</i> spp.	Manzanita	●	Full sun to part shade	Varies	Varies	Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Armeria maritima</i>	Sea pink	●	Full sun/Good drainage	4-8"	6-12"	Little-Occasional	EBMUD	
<i>Baccharis pilularis</i> 'Twin Peaks'	Prostrate Coyote brush	●	Full sun	1'	10-15'	Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Baccharis salicifolia</i>	Mulefat	●	Full sun	8'	8'	Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Ceanothus</i> spp.	Ceanothus	●	Full sun to part shade	Varies	Varies	Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Epilobium canum</i>	California fuchsia	●	Full sun to part shade/Good drainage	1'	4'	Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Eriogonum fasciculatum</i>	Flattop buckwheat	●	Full sun/Good drainage	2-3'	4'	Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Eschscholzia californica</i>	California poppy	●	Full sun/Good drainage	6-12"	6"	Very Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Fragaria chiloensis</i>	Beach strawberry	●	Sun to part shade/Well drained	10"	Spreading	Infrequent to Occasional	WUCOLS	
<i>Heteromeles arbutifolia</i> *	Toyon	●	Full sun to part shade/Good drainage	10-20'	10-15'	Little-None	EBMUD	
<i>Lavatera</i> spp.	Tree mallow	●	Full sun/Good drainage	Varies	Varies	Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Lepechinia calycina</i>	Pitcher sage	●	Full sun with pm shade/Good drainage	3-5'	1-2'	Little-None	EBMUD	
<i>Lupinus albifrons</i> *	Bush lupine	●	Full sun/Excellent drainage	3-5'	3-5'	Little-None	EBMUD	
<i>Mimulus aurantiacus</i>	Common monkeyflower	●	Full sun to part shade	3-4'	3-4'	Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Mimulus cardinalis</i>	Scarlet monkeyflower	●	Full sun to part shade/Adaptable	2-3'	2-3'	Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Garrya elliptica</i>	Coast silk tassel	●	Afternoon shade inland	10-20'	10-20'	Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Rhamnus californica</i>	Coffeeberry	●	Sun or part shade/Good drainage	3-15'	6-8'	Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Ribes malvaceum</i>	Chaparral currant	●	Sun to part shade	5'	5'	Very Low	WUCOLS	
<i>Solidago californica</i>	Goldenrod	●	Part shade	1-4'	1-2'	Little-None	EBMUD	
<i>Symphoricarpos albus</i>	Snowberry	●	Part shade	3-5'	3-5'	Occasional-Little	EBMUD	

spp. = multiple species

Reference sources:

CNP: California Native Plant Society, www.cnps.org

EBMUD: *Plants and Landscapes for Summer-Dry Climates*, May 2004, Nora Harlow (editor).

Sunset: *Sunset Western Garden Book*, Sunset Publishing Corp.

WUCOLS: Water Use Classifications of Landscape Species for Region 1 (No. Central Coast), University of California Cooperative

*Considered poisonous. Classified as "Major Toxicity" by California Poison Control System 2010.

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