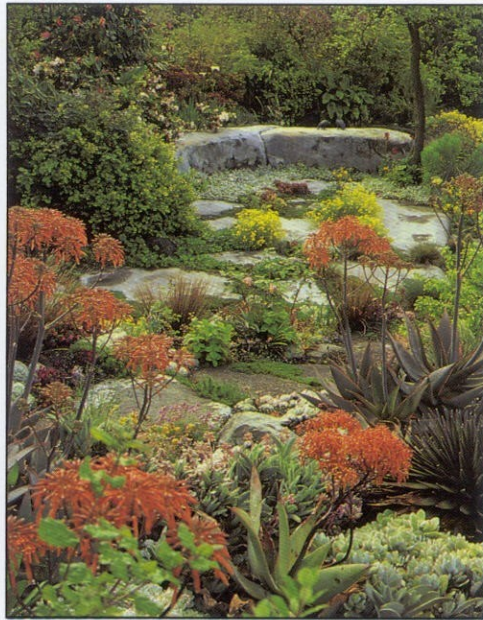
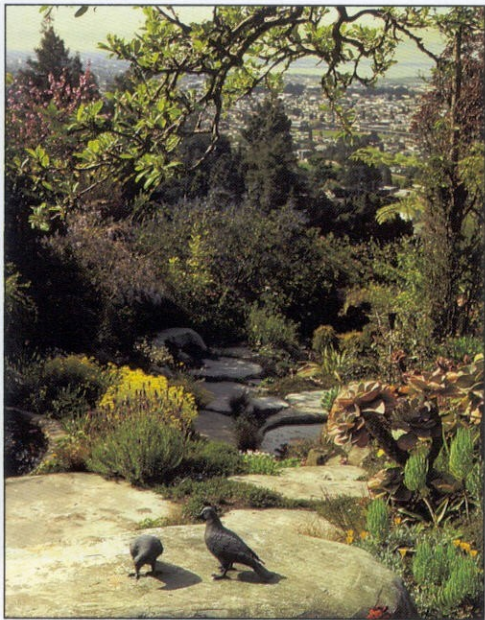




Hand Garden (see p. 125)
Dark pools, light concrete, masses of gray foliage.

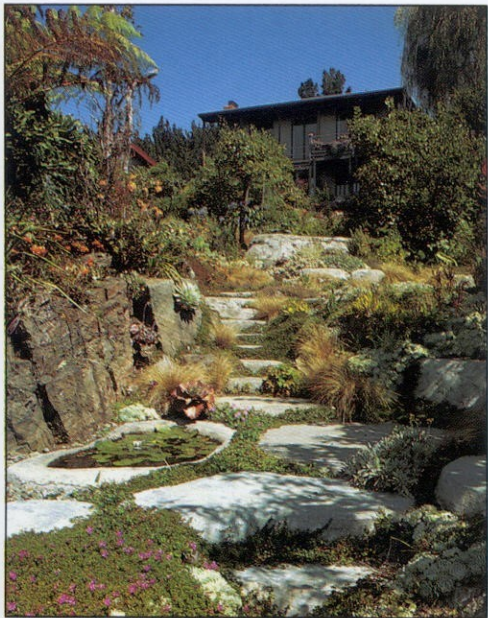
Photos by Pamela Harper





Harland Hand Garden (see p. 125)
Change of elevation, bright contrast of light and dark colors.

Photos by Pamela Harper



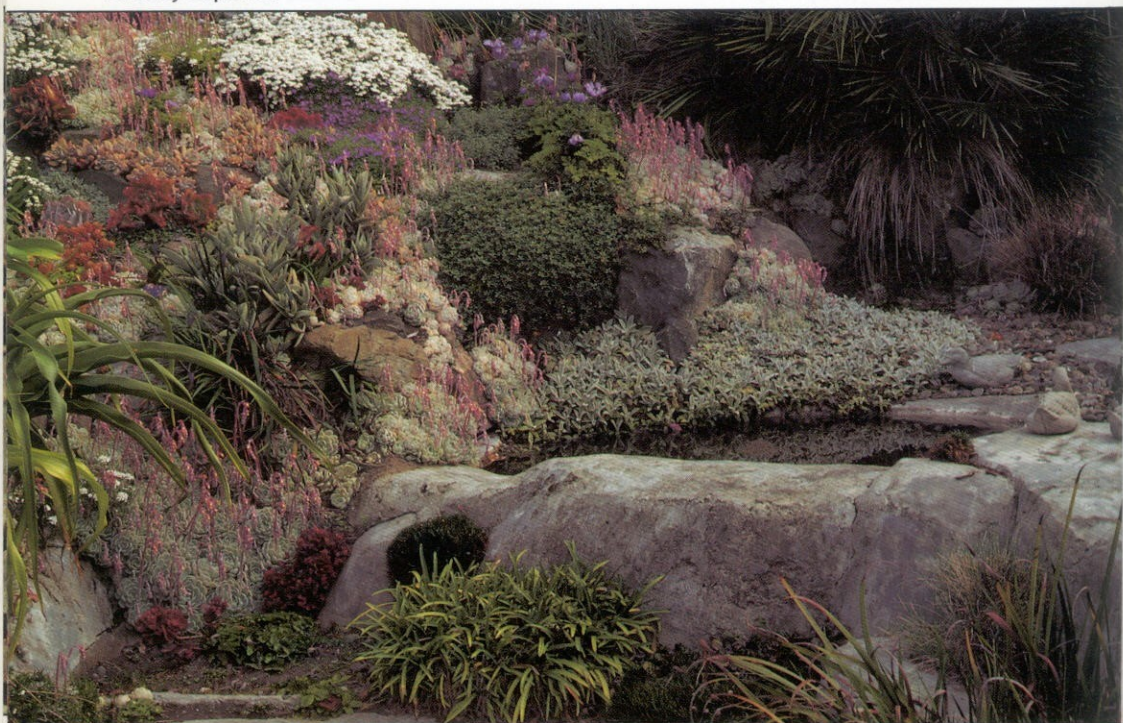


Iris Garden designed by Harland Hand (see p. 125)
Diversity of plants, use of berms.

Pamela Harper

Harland Hand garden (see p. 125)
Diversity of plants.

Pamela Harper



The California Garden

by *Harland Hand*

I have never seen another area in the world as full of nature's original, varied garden inspirations as California. Because of latitude, a great range of elevations, nearness to the cold currents of the Pacific Ocean, and mountain barriers, every corner brings a new environmental adventure. Mountain, glacier, alpine, lowland, flatland, meadow, forest, marsh, swamp, lake, ocean, valley, desert and, for rock gardeners, every kind of rock outcropping—new, old, volcanic, sedimentary—there are myriad natural places to reap garden ideas. Nature rarely repeats herself in this "State of Diversity."

When even a slight change of elevation can add new plant habitats, it is hard to imagine how many diverse habitats are encompassed by a variation in elevation from more than 200' below sea level to nearly 15,000' above. Add the cold air coming off the chilling Pacific Ocean currents and there come temperature ranges and precipitation variations that lead to layers upon layers of

entwined habitats. Try to imagine this physical diversity, then consider that each different habitat has its own special community of plant species. Also, in addition to these plants evolved to fill specific habitats, California has species persisting from before the glacial period plus new ones from after glaciation all mixed in various combinations—a close search finds few places similar to each other. Diversity is California.

Diversity can also be the California garden. Probably the most interesting way to introduce diversity is to lift various elements that involve variation from the surrounding landscape, then modify them for the design of individual gardens. It is also a useful way to nestle a garden into its landscape. Of great interest to me is employing color patterns, rocks, growing media, changes of elevation, and especially shapes and proportions from the surrounding landscape into the design of a garden. Also by doing this, it would follow naturally that we can create truly American-California style gardens.

Creating Elevation Changes

In the garden, well proportioned mounds of piled earth and rocks can recreate the visual effect of the varied elevations that most distinguish the California landscape. Bringing in a large quantity of soil for mounds, or doing an extensive re-contouring of a hillside to create such an effect can be the best investment a rock gardener can make. If the mounds contrast in both height and size and the slopes vary from gentle to very steep, the garden will take on a particularly dramatic quality. The greater the contrast of mound shape and size, the greater the number of microclimates, the greater the variety of plants, the greater the interest, the greater the drama of the garden scene—what more can one ask?

Developing varied habitats for special and challenging plants is much of what rock gardening is about. Mounding is a successful device for producing varied habitats to accommodate a variety of plants, each desiring its favorite conditions. Driest at the top, wettest at the bottom, sun from the south, shade from the north, every niche in the mound is a different microclimate, a good home for some plant with special demands...just what the rock plant collector ordered, and for the artistic gardener...great satisfaction in having a vast variety of plants to give richness and subtlety to the masterpiece.

To build mounds, I use our adobe clay topsoil because it shrinks the least as it settles. High humus soils break down so completely that they are here today and gone tomorrow. Adobe is heavy and sticky, so it adheres tightly to the rocks, thus holding both secure-

ly in place. Where I need special soils for special plants, I simply scoop out a shelf, sloping it slightly outward for water to drain away (a hole can become a soggy container for water). I replace the adobe with scree, humus, acid soil, or whatever my particular plant may require. I do not object to making whole mounds of scree or other soils. The shelf method does allow for the greatest flexibility in a garden's design scheme.

Bringing Plant Diversity to the Garden

If a garden is to capture the feel of California, as in the California wilderness, the gardener should be free to use a profusion of plant varieties. Such diversity creates interest, and if organized artistically, produces an endlessly fascinating combination of serenity and excitement.

Nearly every plant lover has a passion for growing more and more varieties. I try whatever interests me, and undoubtedly over the years I have lost more varieties of plants than now grow in my garden. Because I try a lot of high risk plants and do not want to see them lost, I attempt to propagate a new plant both to share with more skillful gardeners and to produce enough specimens so I can experiment with various growing conditions. First on my list of experiments is duplicating the plant's natural habitat. Often that does not work, so I have learned to try the plant in several different microclimates within my garden; many times a plant will thrive in conditions quite different than what I had expected.

I often go to the wilderness for clues as to how to group new plants and how to grow them. Consequently

pictures of a plant in its wilderness habitat are very important to me. However, nothing takes the place of the real natural wilderness; it can never be duplicated and, for many reasons, must be preserved wherever possible. "If any doubt never destroy" is my motto. Restoration of a wilderness should be tried; nature will eventually take over to create a new wilderness, but it will not ever be the way it was. However, as with every garden, let us be challenged.

Natives or More?

I grow a mixture of plants from all over the world, those that combine best include those from climates similar to California's "Mediterranean climate." Australia, South Africa, southern Europe, etc., all have beautiful native plants that thrive when planted beside our natives. However, I do not know of any device more likely to create a "California Style Garden" than using native California plants exclusively.

Growing any combination of California native plants requires thought and special efforts. A high percentage of native species require drought for at least part of the year, usually in summer, making them nearly impossible to grow in gardens with abundant summer rain. In the San Francisco Bay Area we have dry summers, so most gardeners water regularly. However, it is possible to water only the restricted areas of the garden where we group plants requiring summer water, and then to distribute drought tolerant species wherever else it pleases us. Where there is summer rain or in a whole garden that is extensively watered,

some summer drought plants can be placed in the driest areas, such as on the top of a mound. A plant will then have its crown dry (a usual requirement) and be able to send its roots where it pleases. This often works—at least for a while.

It is seldom easy to combine California native plants with favorite plants from other parts of the world. Many attractive California natives require extraordinary growing conditions. Our native *Darlingtonia* and many alpiners flourish only in soils with spring water constantly filtering through, a very difficult condition to duplicate. Desert plants, serpentine endemics, and coastal rock plants are other examples that can defy the ingenuity of the most adventuresome gardener. Rotting away, slow death, or vigorous growth followed by a quick demise are some of the discouraging results. Yet I would not want to inhibit any gardener from trying different and difficult plants, or from trying new methods of growing some desired plant, because the majority of successful gardening techniques have been discovered by amateur gardeners.

The California Look

Despite the diversity of plants and microclimate, the California landscape has a distinctive regional appearance. Besides the obvious changes of elevation that dominate nearly every landscape, I see two other qualities that are responsible for that look.

First, let us consider California light: It is brilliant and clearly focused. The moisture and temperature of the air, the latitude, the cold Pacific



Ocean, and the high mountains are probably the elements that produce our extraordinary California light. This brilliant, clear light produces a picture sharply focused. It pervades the scene with startling contrasts; sharp black shadows contrast with dazzlingly bright highlights, presenting a land of strong dark and light color contrast more intense than any other place in the world. This light is a photographer's dream, and photographers revel in it, as thousands of "made in California" movies attest. A camera can modify clear light, but it can not make a clear picture from fuzzy light. This light also controls how colors work in a garden.

In California light, colors go together in unexpected ways. Colors, especially bright colors, can be combined in ways that would not be pleasing under another kind of light—puzzling to people whose tastes are based on the misty pastels of English gardens. In California, the

play of dark and light contrast gives colors a jewel-like quality that is both exuberant and subtle, providing us with a range of successful color combinations not to be exceeded anywhere. Colors of somber drama, of pastel quiet, of pageant brilliance, of comic gaudiness, of cottage informality, of estate formality, all possible and all wonderfully workable in this one area of the world.

California Contrast

Second, California's color contrasts: Nearly everywhere the landscape is dominated by strong dark and light color contrast—color contrasts that make almost any photograph of California readily identifiable. These strong contrasts produced by the intense, clear California light are the key to California color. In mid-morning light, a Monterey Cypress will have black shadows with pale green highlights. Across the countryside, the pale gold-

en grass of undulating hills contrasts with the nearly black live oaks drifting over them. White snow-capped mountain ranges rise out of dark mysterious foothills, deep green pine trees pale the light grey of Sierra granite, dark conifers sharpen the brilliance of the Pacific Ocean behind them and the light blue sky above. These contrasts dominate nearly every California landscape. They create a wonderfully dramatic environment.

Observing this dark and light color contrast can be an advantage, because it inspires a color plan that can be used in any garden anywhere but one that is especially successful in California. The plan involves combining three color categories: light (pale colors); middle-tone (in-between colors); and dark colors. I look at a black-and-white photograph of my garden, and I can readily locate the areas of each category. Middle-tone is the middle ground between dark and light, and most plants fall into this category, because most foliage is middle-tone green. Pale pinks, yellow, cream, white and lavender are among the light colors. Maroon-red, dark blue, purple and black are some dark colors.

To organize garden color, I make light-colored shapes by grouping plants with light foliage or pale flowers together; I create dark shapes using the same kind of grouping but with dark-colored plants. The trick is to place these strong dark or light shapes rhythmically through the middle-tone areas. The more the dark and light contrast dominates (black against white being the most contrasting in the garden), the more brilliant and jewel-like the remaining colors

become and the better all colors seem to go together. Even colors otherwise perceived as muddy seem to come to life. I find that "dark, light, middle-tone color organization" works especially well in rock gardens, because massing tiny plants into groups with close color relationships in tone and intensity tends to emphasize and harmonize their most subtle differences. Visitors will take a second look.

Such dark and light color contrast is not always easy to establish. Pale-colored flowers come and go through the year, so a more permanent pattern of pale foliage (gray, variegated, etc.) is a must. I use any light-colored foliage that interests me; the list is long. Lamb's ears (*Stachys byzantina*) is one of my mainstays because it flourishes in nearly every situation. However it does attract our ravenous California gophers—the most frustrating animal ever to invade a garden. Items other than plants that register as light colors are concrete (no color added), light-colored sculptures of birds and animals, along with benches, pottery, etc. I find such things wonderfully useful in making interesting color patterns.

Middle-tone shapes are seldom a problem since most plant colors fall in this category. They usually form the mass of a garden's colors, especially in areas of the world with abundant and evenly distributed annual rainfall.

Dark colors are rarest, especially among rock garden plants. I cherish those that I find. A succulent that with a little effort can be kept under 12", the dramatic, maroon-black *Aeonium arboreum* 'Zwartkop' is one of my favorite dark-colored

plants. I use drifts of it across some areas of the garden. Black *Ophiopogon planiscapus* 'Nigrescens' is another; however, it is slow-growing and sometimes reverts to green. Some conifers, such as Hinoki cypress (*Chamaecyparis obtusa*) and its dwarf forms and Mugo pines, register darker than most plants. They work especially well when placed next to a light shape. Where I can not use dark-colored plants, I often incorporate dark rocks or statuary painted black. Ponds of dark water, because they also reflect the sky and colors around them, give a special punch when used as part of the dark color pattern of the garden. In my garden are nineteen ponds. Their dark waters do wonders by reflecting colors and echoing San Francisco Bay below.

The Invasion

The beauty of the California landscape, its diversity, and the agreeableness of the climate in so many areas attract throngs of individuals who find a niche somewhere across the state. Thus there is a real danger of becoming over-populated, not only by *Homo sapiens* but by their accompanying species. *En masse* they invade the special habitats that abound in this "State of Diversity," so much that this could become the "State of Divestiture." When from my windows I view across the land, and I see the dark and light color contrast of our extraordinary natural scene being replaced by so many new buildings, I am troubled. But I remember that I am one of the invading species that change the landscape: I invaded this place, I built a house, I made a

garden, I imported species, I made changes. All changes demand constant re-evaluation in order to make the best of everything, not just the best for now but "the best in the long run"—what that is, is endlessly arguable. We live closer and closer to a dangerous edge of both natural, and manmade destruction and there is no panacea.

A gardener's sensitivity to the extraordinary quality of the California landscape can go a long way toward preserving at least the feel of the natural wilderness. Gardens can reflect the contrast of color, of elevations, and, of course, include combinations of native plants. Through artistic design, an appreciation of this often enchanting state can be displayed in gardens that belong here, gardens that touch the landscape with their own contributing enchantment. Through our planning and sensitivity gardens can reflect a deepened sense of our wildernesses for the generations to come.

Harland Hand is an artist who has turned his talent to the creation of gardens. His own garden in El Cerrito, California is both a fabulous collection of plants and a remarkable designed environment. Harland also designs and builds gardens for others.