

## The Joys of the CA Poppy

A few months ago a letter was sent to the editor of the Madera Tribune suggesting that people do what people in other cities have done: contribute to their home town beautification by planting tulips. Here is another suggestion. Plant California Poppies! After all, the San Joaquin Valley was once the province of many acres of golden poppies and other wildflower species. A few have even survived.

“As we passed below the hills,” wrote Jeff Mayfield in 1850 when he first encountered the San Joaquin Valley, “the whole plain was covered with great patches of rose, yellow, scarlet, orange, and blue. The colors did not seem to mix to any great extent. Each kind of flower liked a certain kind of soil best, and some of the patches of one color were a mile or more across.”

Golden poppies grow wild and naturalize freely in the hills of the Sierra Nevada, in valley pastures, along roadsides, backyard gardens and the crevices of rock gardens.

Seeds can be sown in fall or early spring directly into the soil. They do not transplant well.

California poppies, aka *Eschscholzia Californica*, need full sun and well-drained soil, but will tolerate poor soil. The flowers becomes drought resistant after they become established on a site. Once the plants have developed a secure root system, they require less water.

The poppy seeds should be planted ¼ inch or less deep. Water lightly as over-watering can cause the roots to rot. Fertilization is not recommended. Over fertilizing can cause an abundance of foliage with few or no flowers.

Deadheading, i.e. cutting off dead blooms will encourage continued flowering. Different colors can be purchased such as white, creme, pink, yellow, red, as well as the familiar gold. If you do not find the seed color you are looking for on a nursery or store shelf, look up *Eschscholzia Californica*, Golden poppy, or California poppy on the Internet. You can sometimes locate seed catalogs that provide otherwise hard to find varieties. Some company's sell the seed by the pound.

To remind ourselves of the beauty this valley once provided, grow the golden flower.

Considering the golden history of the California Poppy; it is a natural choice. Not only is it the State Flower of California, it is indigenous to the Central Valley as well as other areas of the state.

Know that through a small effort by lots of people, beauty can be ignited in a large way. Imagine a flame of color. Imagine an acre of poppies. Imagine a field of gold. Plant seeds.

*This column is provided by the University Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Program in Madera County. The Master Gardener program extends research based information in home horticulture and pest management, verified by University of California experts to the citizens of our state. Call you U.C. Cooperative Extension Office in Madera with your gardening questions at 559-675-7879 Ext.204 to leave a msg, or stop by the office on Mondays from 1:00 - 3:00 p.m. to speak to a Master Gardener in person.*