The term liana is used to describe any long-stemmed, woody vine that is rooted in the soil and climbs or wraps around other plants. Many of these California native vines provide a tremendous amount of botanical interest and wildlife habitat value because of their unique growth habit.

We are fortunate to have several common native lianas in our local wildlands that we can observe while enjoying a hike or another outdoor activity, and many grow very well in a garden setting. Three in particular are chaparral honeysuckle, chaparral clematis, and California wild grape.

Chaparral honeysuckle (*Lonicera interrupta*) grows in the north state’s foothill woodlands and can be found woven into many shrub and tree species. While somewhat inconspicuous much of the year, each spring the semi-woody vine supports many bunches of showy yellow to reddish tubular flowers that grow from the ends of bright green stems and leaves. If you don’t notice them right away, just watch for the hummingbirds, which will spend weeks visiting the flowers and lead you right to the vine.

In fall, the flowers give way to beautiful round, shiny, red fruits the size of blueberries. Instead of
drawing hummingbirds, the plant then provides food for our seed- and fruit-eating birds like American robins and cedar waxwings. The species likes partial shade to full sun, grows fairly rapidly, and is well-suited to climb onto any shrub or tree.

Chaparral honeysuckle (*Lonicera interrupta*) is a favorite of hummingbirds. Flowers, above, and fruits, below. Photos by *Len Lindstrand III.*

Chaparral clematis (*Clematis lasiantha*) also grows in our surrounding foothills and is found mainly in dry chaparral and woodlands. Another classic example of a plant changing phases with the seasons, the vine starts each year by sneaking its leaf petioles into shrubs or trees while slowly developing numerous creamy white flowers that bloom and often engulf the host plant with a blanket of flowers. The vine quiets down for a while until late summer when the fruits open and become large seed heads that look like big fluffy Q-tips for fall viewing. The vine will die back for winter and return in early spring.

California wild grape (*Vitis californica*) is well-known from streamside and floodplain areas, and is what gives many of such places a jungle-like appearance. The vigorous vine sends out many young green stems from very attractive older stems that become woody and covered with shaggy bark with age. The young stems produce numerous broad, fan-shaped leaves 3 to 4 inches long and up to 6 inches wide. In late summer, these vines produce many bunches of purple quarter-inch grapes that really attract the birds and even a few small mammals. Before resting for the winter, California grape provides fall color. The leaves turn beautiful shades of yellow, orange, red, and purple, providing a stunning backdrop or color mix wherever it grows.

Woody and herbaceous stems, climbing and intertwining growing habit, showy flowers, beautiful
fruits, odd seed heads, and seasonal colors are good reasons to include some or all of these plants in your garden. The plants, particularly California grape, can be used to quickly cover a fence or trellis or as natural screening draped over trees. A real bonus to planting lianas is the wildlife habitat value that the plants bring to the landscape. Besides the nectar and fruit, these plants also provide structural diversity, intertwining themselves into shrubs, trees, fences, walls, or whatever you let them climb onto. The intertwined stems and leaves provide screening and roosting cover, giving wintering birds a place to hide in the winter when most foliage has dropped from our trees and shrubs.

If you add some of our native lianas to your garden, many butterflies, bees, other insects, and scores of birds will appreciate your efforts and reward you with year-round, nonstop viewing.