The Shasta Chapter of the California Native Plant Society (CNPS) will ring in spring with its sixth biennial garden tour on Saturday, April 29, from 10 AM to 4 PM. You are invited to walk through five private residential gardens that will pleasantly surprise you with landscapes that are exceptionally diverse. These residential properties include a dense oak woodland, an open pine and oak woodland, and various sizes of suburban gardens in which you will have the opportunity to meander down paths lined with native aromatic sages, waving grasses, and colorful perennials.

These gardens represent a broad spectrum of native (and non-native) plant habitats in garden landscapes located within the greater Redding and Cottonwood areas, within somewhat diverse geographical areas of Shasta County. Garden visitors will be especially interested in seeing the variety of native plant landscapes that reflect the varied interests of their owners. The gardens will provide excellent inspiration for garden enthusiasts.

There is still concern that California’s water usage is extreme and not effectively controlled. This situation has been exacerbated by the recent drought years, although this current rainy season may have masked this issue for a while. Climate change has made annual weather patterns fluctuate greatly; despite this wet winter, another drought is surely on its way. The California Native Plant Society encourages the use of California natives as a smart alternative to water-guzzling plants and lawns since many California native plants are intrinsically drought tolerant. All of the gardens on this year’s tour show that native plants offer aesthetically pleasing, water-wise options for urban, suburban, and outlying residential property landscapes.
One outlying one-acre private garden on the tour displays a mostly drought-tolerant native and non-native plant environment. Owners Susan & Dave Wallace removed their front yard lawn in 2016, built up small mounds of native soil, added dry stream beds, and planted numerous drought-tolerant native plants of varying size, shape, color, and scent. Though the plants are still young, the landscaping of this front yard offers good ideas for potential front yard native plant landscapes.

As you make your way into the Wallaces’ backyard, you will experience a wonderful variety of nine specific garden landscapes, one being a Japanese garden. These gardens are made up of both native and non-native species but tend to include mostly drought-tolerant species.

Another garden is situated on a suburban lot in the Redding area near the Sacramento River. Like the Wallaces, Terri & Jay Thesken also re-landscaped their front yard in 2016 by removing the lawn, building up soil mounds, and planting native plant species. In contrast to the Wallaces’ yard, the Theskens had already completed a partial front yard transformation in 2015, which will allow the tour visitor to compare a phenomenal two years’ growth of plants with one year’s plant growth. Both the Wallaces and the Theskens applied for and received “Save Our Water” program rebate checks from the State of California for their front yard projects.

The mission of the California Native Plant Society is to increase the public’s awareness, understanding, and appreciation of California’s native flora. In light of the recent years of local drought conditions and subsequent water usage restrictions, California native plant landscapes offer a strong alternative to traditional landscaping. The CNPS garden tour provides both beginning and lifelong gardeners with the information and inspiration needed to create new native gardens, as well as ideas for incorporating complementary native plants into existing landscapes.

Shasta Chapter CNPS members and gardeners will be on hand at each garden to answer questions. Native plants and native plant books will be available for purchase at one of the gardens. Tickets will be available in mid April and can be bought at Wyntour Gardens and Gold Leaf Nursery, both in Redding, or online at www.shastacnps.org. Ticket price is $5, which includes admittance to all five gardens. For more information, check out the website, or contact Donal Jonio at 530/221-4280 or dfjorca@charter.net.

Many of the plants featured in the gardens on this tour will be available at the Shasta College Spring Plant Sale that is held in conjunction with the California Native Plant Society. This year’s sale will be at the Shasta College Farm Greenhouses from Thursday through Saturday, April 6 to 8, and will feature an array of native plants as well as the College Horticultural Department’s vegetables and flowers. Hours of the sale are 8 AM to 5 PM on Thursday and Friday, and 9 AM to 3 PM on Saturday. For more information on this Spring Plant Sale, please call 530/221-0906.