Here in the north state, summer heat is tough on our landscapes. Fortunately, there are exceptional California native plants that excel in our unique climate. Among them is *Lupinus albifrons*, commonly known as silver bush lupine.

Silver bush lupine is a member of the pea family. It grows below 5,000 feet in elevation and is found on dry slopes and flats from southern California to southern Oregon. For local viewing, there are plants scattered along the Sacramento River Trail in Redding. Regionally, there is a generous population thriving on the coastal bluffs of Humboldt County, and the plants can be found throughout the Sierra Nevada foothills.

From its stupendous mid-spring to early summer bloom of purple-blue spires to its handsome silvery foliage, lupine offers year-round appeal and toughness that make it a must for California landscapes and gardens.

Ranging in size from 18 inches to a more common height of 3 to 4 feet, silver bush lupine makes a wonderful background plant in perennial gardens. It is great as an accent tucked among deeper green perennials or shrubs, and it is wonderful scattered under oaks.

Acceptance of a wide range of soils and irrigation allow it to perform well under myriad environments in Shasta County. It will flourish with absolutely no water, even in heavy clay soil.
Another advantage is that, being a legume, it creates attractive seed heads that eventually pop and scatter seed. A few will germinate each year, allowing naturalizing of the plant—if that’s what you desire. Otherwise, the seed heads can be removed and discarded or saved and sprinkled in an area where you might enjoy a few more of these gems.

In terms of benefits to your garden habitat, silver bush lupine is nitrogen-fixing, provides nectar to butterflies and bumblebees, and the seeds are food for quail and other ground birds.

If you are looking for erosion control or have a tough, rocky slope that you would like to enhance, this is the plant for you. If you are one of the many Shasta County gardening enthusiasts who struggle with those pesky browsing deer, you will be delighted to know that *Lupinus albifrons* is very deer-resistant. Above all, the versatile perennial is truly low maintenance and adds aesthetic and function to gardens.

In the Redding area, you might find this plant for sale at Turtle Bay Exploration Park and the Shasta Chapter of the California Native Plant Society’s spring and fall plant sales. In Chico, it is sometimes available at Floral Native Nursery. There are many online nurseries, such as www.anniesannuals.com, where it can be purchased.

Silver bush lupine, *Lupinus albifrons*. Photo by Michele Driggs.