Design It Yourself California Native Garden

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My goal in this presentation is to help homeowners who want to replace their imported landscapes and lawns with California native plants, birds and butterflies. I want to stress that this is NOT the same as hiring a professional landscape designer who has spent decades honing his or her craft. They earn their money. But if you don't have it, here goes.

Steps for landscape design:
1. Goals
2. Budget
3. Site Analysis
4. Base Map
5. Balloon Diagram
6. Select Plants

Design Concepts
- The rule of odd numbers
- Massing
- Layering
- Repetition
- Contrast
- Function

Try to create year-round interest
Bones: hardscape that is attractive, bold and functional
Bones can also be structural permanent trees and shrubs
Guts: outstanding and beautiful perennials
Skin: ground covers that tie it all together visually
Accents: focal points to draw the eye

Common mistakes:
- The collector's garden (one of everything!) looks a jumble
- Overplanting – learn the mature size of plants
- Not enough contrast between plants – many CA natives have small leaves
- Designing by flower color – flowering is only a fraction of the year
- Not creating conditions for the plants to thrive
- Mixing different hydrozones, so some plants are over or underwatered
- Not maintaining the garden, this gives natives a bad reputation

What do you need for the design?
- Measuring tape(s)
- Ruler (but an architect's scale is easier)
- Large piece of paper (gridded is easier)
- Compass or another way to find north

What does professional landscape design usually cost?
- Typical landscape designer rates are around $75-125/hr
- Landscape architects are higher (usually 10-12% of construction cost)
- Average front yard design costs range from $1000 to $2500
- Average backyard design costs range from $2000 to $4000

Professional costs listed: http://www.earthcareland.com/what-we-do/installation.html

Goals - this is a sample list. Make your own list, and then prioritize it.
- Low maintenance
- Save water
- Bird and pollinator habitat
- Path to back gate
- Screening neighbor's ugly shed
- Compatible with style of house & neighborhood
- Make entry more welcoming
- Landscape around an existing redwood tree

Base Map - start by measuring the whole area
Fit it on your large page at ¼" or 1/8" scale
1. Site the house with windows/doors
2. Property lines
3. North arrow
4. Driveway and paths, hose bibbs, utilities, downspouts, fence and gates
5. Trees/shrubs that are staying (show their canopy, too)

Don't draw the items you want to get rid of (overgrown bushes, broken hardscape, etc.)
Make at least 3 copies of the base map, or use trace paper over the original

Site Analysis (assets & problems and needs)
- Sunset climate zone
- Look for possible microclimates
- Soil testing
- Identify plants to remove (be critical here!)
- Identify sun/shade patterns
- Important views of and from the house
- Things you want to hide
- Overhead wires, poles, trees (& neighbor's overhanging tree too)
- Logically traveled paths

Conceptual Diagram – this is a generalized version of how you will solve the issues found in the site analysis (without specifying details - i.e. "8' tall screening" or "low & colorful"). Play around with different ideas to see the one you like best.

Soil Testing
- Profile (dig a hole)
- Composition (simple tests)
- pH (simple home test kit)
- Drainage (Percolation/hole test)
- Fertility (professional lab)
- Biology (professional lab)

Professionals for soil testing
Chemical testing for soil fertility, pH, and more
- Master Gardeners of Santa Clara County post a list online
  www.mastergardeners.org/pdf/import/resources/Soil_testing_laboratory_list.pdf
Biological testing for fungi, bacteria, nematodes
- Botanical Arts   Alane Weber   650-348-2094
- Mauby All Natural   Brian Debasitis   www.mauby.com
- Soil Foodweb Intl. Dr. Elaine Ingham www.soilfoodweb.com

How to create the plan: start with the plain base map (or trace paper over the map)

1. Draw in the fences, paths and hardscape, consider natural circulation and attractive paths. (Structure) If you have a hard time visualizing, go into the yard and use a garden hose. Tip: Don't design too many narrow planting areas - it's too hard to keep the plants from spilling onto the paths.
2. Put in the largest and most important items, like mounds, trees and screening (Bones)
3. Add in the medium size shrubs, focal points and accents (Smaller Bones). Tip: use a placeholder of the same size and look out your window at it.
4. Now it's time to add in some perennials (Guts) Don't get overwhelmed; design one area at a time, but make it connect to the whole, adjusting plants and spacing as you go. Tips: Keep plants low near walkways, plant by odd numbers, avoid straight lines, stagger plants instead. Massing (larger groupings of the same plant) creates harmony.
5. If you have open spaces between plants, add low, spreading ground cover shrubs to unify the whole design (Skin). Tips: Give them enough space to grow low, otherwise constant side pruning may make them grow tall (Ceanothus 'Yankee Point' does this). You can plant annuals while they are growing in.

How to work with a professional and still save money:
If this all seems formidable, do this homework first:

1. Make a list of goals/desires
2. Take pictures of landscapes you like
3. Create an accurate plot map in ¼" or 1/8" scale
4. Analyse your sun/shade patterns
5. Make a list of plants you like
6. Use a hose and chalk to determine shapes of hardscapes and write down square footages
7. Go to a building supply w/measurements to help establish materials and budget

Then bring in a consulting designer to help you pull the elements together.

Books:
Reimagining the California Lawn (Water-conserving Plants, Practices, and Designs)
Carol Bornstein, David Fross, Bart O'Brien

Designing California Native Gardens
(The Plant Community Approach to Artful, Ecological Gardens)
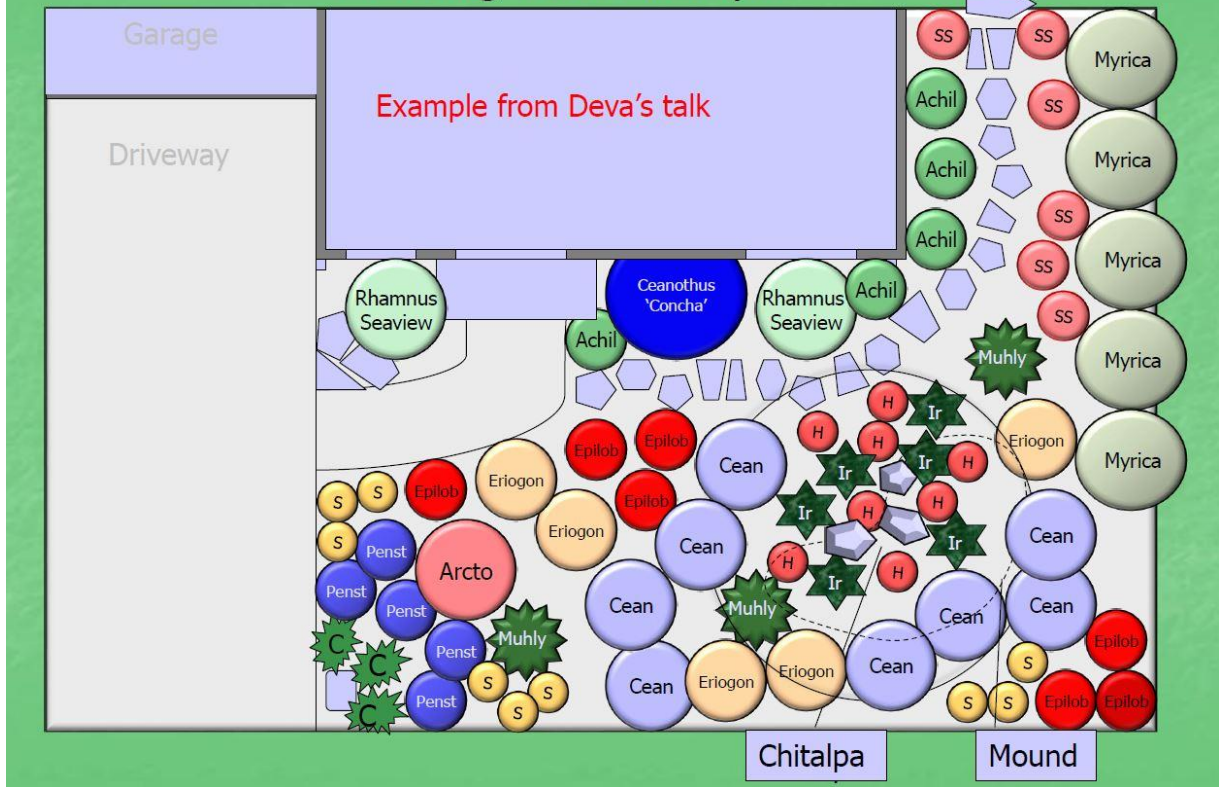Glenn Keator and Alrie Middlebrook

Sample Designs:
On Yerba Buena Nursery's website' homepage:
http://www.yerbabuenanursery.com/lawn_alternatives_article.php
City of San Jose's "Garden Designs for your Yard"
http://www.sanjoseca.gov/index.aspx?NID=3734

Planting Plan Example

No.	Code	Botanical Name	Common Name	Plant Type
1		x Chitalpa tashkentensis	Chitalpa	Tree
1	Arcto	Arctostaphylos 'Louis Edmonds'	Manzanita	Specimen Shrub
1		Ceanothus 'Concha'	California Lilac	Specimen Shrub
5	Myrica	Myrica californica	Wax Myrtle	Screening
2		Rhamnus 'Seaview'	Dwarf Coffeeberry	Foundation Shrub
5	Penst	Penstemon 'Margarita BOP'	Foothill Penstemon	Perennial
7	Epilob	Epilobium 'Select Mattole'	California Fuchsia	Perennial
8	Cean	Ceanothus 'Centennial'	California Lilac	Ground Cover
5	Achil	Achillea millefolium	Yarrow	Perennial
3	Muhly	Muhlenbergia rigens	Deer Grass	Architectural Grass
6	SS	Salvia spathacea	Hummingbird Sage	Perennial
5		Eriogonum 'Warriner Lytle'	California Buckwheat	Ground Cover
6	Ir	Iris 'Canyon Snow'	Pacific Coast Iris	Accent Perennial
7	H	Heuchera 'Wendy'	Coral Bells	Perennial
9	S	Eriogonum 'Shasta Sulfur'	Sulfur Buckwheat	Perennial
3	C	Carex tumulicola	Berkeley Sedge	Clumping Grass