

### Early Bloomers

The color palettes of California's winters may be muted, but if you look closely you'll see a range of color and shapes in the form of winter blooms and flowers. Pollinators are scarce during the winter months; those that remain have a few early-winter bloom plants from which to choose. Winter months tend to bring harsher climates, and winter blooms have adapted their morphological characteristics to survive. Some winter blooms, such as those found on manzanitas and on *Ribes speciosum*, have waxy upside-down flowers that are protected from the elements. Because winter pollinators tend to be few and far between, the flowers of winter blooms also tend to last longer, sometimes blooming for weeks at a time, providing crucial food for insects and overwintering Anna's hummingbirds.



*The Arctostaphylos densiflora 'Howard McMinn', pictured left at the Native Plant Demonstration Garden in Dimond Park was planted in 1998. This plant, a California native but not a watershed local, is seen blooming on a cool late January morning. Many manzanitas bloom in winter, but the earliest bloomers begin in September and October, providing nectar to hummingbirds and butterflies when most other plants have stopped blooming.*

Phenology is the study of the seasonal and cyclic nature of plant and animal life, providing an understanding of how a species' behavior changes and adaptations over time. Examining changes over time and through the seasons in our watershed provides key insights into the local effects and indications of climate change.

At times, early blooms can be a problem; plants use energy and nutrients to bloom and leaf. If they do so too early in the year, they have less stored food and energy to thrive and bloom again. Resulting weakened plants can become susceptible to disease or not produce fruits. This problem has been especially documented on introduced agricultural plants.

But how are Sausal Creek Watershed native plants adapting to changing climactic cycles? Some people trying to answer this question are the members of the [National Phenology Network](#), who study plant and animal species responses to the changes in the seasons. Help collect data!

What have you seen blooming this winter in the Sausal Creek Watershed?  
What changes have you noticed when plants first bloom, insects hatch, and birds appear?

Share your observations with the NPN or on iNaturalist, and tag us on social media.

### **Take a peek at what we've spotted blooming in late January:**

*The Coast Silk-Tassel, *Garrya elliptica* (pictured right) is an evergreen that produces dangling white catkins during January and February. The Coast Silk-Tassel is one of the most visually dramatic winter bloomers native to the Sausal Creek Watershed, but when not in bloom can be confused for a young Coast Live Oak by an inexperienced botanist.*



*Oso berry, *Oemleria cerasiformis* (pictured on the left) is a shrub that blooms in the late winter and early spring just as its leaves are emerging. The plant attracts significant wildlife, including hummingbirds, butterflies, and birds.*



*In the watershed we also find early bloomers in the Ribes genus. Species in the Ribes genus coming into bloom in late winter include the California native R. speciosum (pictured left). It is a much loved non-local California native that can be found in bloom at this time of year. Naturally occurring from Baja California to the San Jose foothills, this plant has been introduced by native plant and drought tolerant gardeners and can be found around the watershed. Commonly called the Fuchsiaflower Gooseberry, this plant blooms into showy and bright blooms in the winter that are an important winter food source for hummingbirds. Their fruits are later eaten by small mammals and birds.*

*Alnus rubra, a riparian tree commonly called Red Alder and found abundantly along Sausal Creek in Dimond Canyon can be seen displaying it's yellow and green catkins during the early winter. The larger male catkins (pictured right) slowly unfold. The female catkins are very small and red and appear scaly, eventually fruiting.*

