



California Redbud in Summer

-- covered with 6-seed pods



Most notable in the late winter-early spring for their brilliant scarlet blooms--especially during Almond Festival in the Capay Valley in March--during the hot summers they are covered with long burnt-siena seed pods--almost as beautiful! Above, they are seen at Lake Berryessa in June, 2013. This drive west of Winters along Highway 128 is flaming with them in the spring, but they also give the dry, golden hills some more-muted color in summer, first purple and then russet-brown to burnt siena--a delight for local artists!

So beautiful they are now domesticated, of course--see bottom right--and have been planted in landscapes by horticulturists in California since 1886. But they are also "useful" trees in nature, too: historically, deer browsed on them and the native people used the wood for bows, the wine-red branches for baskets, and the blossoms for dye. Native to this area and much of western North America, the trees are great natural erosion control along our creeks and hillsides, provide nectar for our valuable native pollinators--the native bumblebee is the natural pollinator--and the introduced honey bees, so important to our almond orchards and other fruit and nut trees Capay Valley depends upon!



Those amazing blooms are seen February to April, but any one tree or shrub is only in bloom for about two weeks. Found in canyons and on steep slopes among communities of oak, chaparral, mixed conifers and riparian woodlands, they are often seen amid the beautiful white blooms of the Buckeye--as seen bottom left. Drought tolerant and sun-loving, they can thrive even in gravelly and poor soil below 4000 feet. And, ironically, the best way to propagate them is through wild fires--the heat cracks the seed coats and provides the heat-requiring germination. To grow your own, pour boiling water

on the seeds, then cover with moss or a damp cloth and refrigerate for two months.

Its burnt-siena mingles with the Buckeye at left.

