



CALIFORNIA WILDROSE

Rosa californica Cham. & Schldl.

Plant Symbol = ROCA2

Common Names: California wild rose, California rose

Scientific Names: *Rosa aldersonii* Greene

Description

General: California wildrose is a native, perennial, evergreen shrub in the Rosaceae family with an erect habit, spreading by rhizomes and frequently forming thickets (Figure 1). It ranges in height from 3 to 8 feet, depending upon the location (Ertter and Lewis, 2008; Ertter, 2014). The stems are green, reddish or brown with few to many curved prickles, frequently paired, thick-based and compressed (Figure 2). The leaf axis may be smooth or hairy and sometimes glandular. There are generally 5 or 7 leaflets, and the terminal leaf is 0.5-2 inches, ovate or elliptic with the widest part below the middle, either single or double toothed, and may be glandular. The inflorescence typically carries between 3 and 30 flowers, with glandless pedicels. The flowers have sepals that are entire and may be glandular or not, petals are pink and generally 0.5 -1 inch, the anthers are numerous and there are 20-40 pistils. Flowering time is February to November, depending on location. The fruit (hip) is generally 0.25-0.5 wide and ovoid, beneath the sepals, which are generally erect and persistent. The chromosome number is n=14.



Figure 1. California wildrose flower and leaves. Lockeford Plant Materials Center (October 2018).

Distribution: California wildrose is widely distributed throughout California although absent from the High Cascade Range, High Sierra Nevada Mountains, Tehachapi Mountain Area and Mojave Desert. It is also found in Southern Oregon and Northern Baja California (Calflora, 2019; Ertter, 2014). For current distribution, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

Habitat: California wildrose is a common shrub component of riparian forest habitat, not confined to wetlands but found in moist areas, particularly streambanks (Alpert et al., 1999). Plant Associations include Yellow Pine Forest, Foothill Woodland, Chaparral, and Valley Grassland (Calflora, 2019; Ertter, 2014).

Adaptation

California wildrose is found at elevations between sea level and 6,000 feet (Ertter, 2014). The plant tolerates a range of soil textures, including fine, medium and coarse and can tolerate moderate salinity (Calflora, 2019). Although most frequently found in moist areas, California wildrose, once established, is capable of surviving drought conditions.

Uses

Vegetation and Erosion Control: California wildrose is effective for revegetating disturbed moist and riparian sites and is easily established. The lateral underground stems spread under suitable conditions stabilizing the soil, although, if the growth is unchecked the shoots spread and may form thorny thickets (Alpert et al., 1999). It is a good plant for hedgerows, as the natural lateral spread of the plant provides good cover (Earnshaw, 2018).

Pollinators and Beneficial Insects: California wildrose has an extended bloom period from March through August and provides forage for pollinators including native bees, butterflies as well as beneficial insects (Calflora, 2019; Earnshaw, 2018; Morandin and Kremen, 2013). Roses produce small amounts of nectar, and the primary insect pollinators of roses are bees gathering pollen. The open-faced flowers of native roses are more attractive to pollinators than varieties with double flowers (Mader et al., 2011).

Wildlife: California wildrose thickets provide excellent cover for wildlife including birds, mammals, ungulates and fish (Hauser, 2006). The fruits (hips) remain on the plant throughout the winter, and are eaten by insects, birds, small mammals, and large mammals such as antelope, mule deer, white-tailed deer, elk and moose browse the leaves and branches (Harper, 1962).

Ethnobotany

Wildrose hips were eaten raw by the Chumash, Karo, Kashaya, Kawaiisu, and Pomo (Goodrich and Lawson, 1980; Schenk and Gifford, 1952; Timbrook, 2007; Zigmond, 1981). Probably many more tribes ate the fruits as the plant is so widely distributed, although rose fruits were reported as rarely eaten by the Yuki (Chestnut, 1902). The unsplit stems were and are used in basketry for coiled baskets of the Kawaiisu (Zigmond, 1981). Many tribes utilized the medicinal properties of California wildrose species: the Chumash used dried powdered rose petals to relieve skin rash in babies, rose petals were made into tea and used to relieve stomach pain (Timbrook, 2007). The Costanoans used decoctions of fruit hips, to reduce fevers, indigestion, for colds, rheumatism and to wash scabs and sores (Harrington and Bocek, 1984), Miwok used infusions of leaves and berries to reduce pain and colic (Barrett and Gifford, 1993). Children of the Chumash would use the fruits for decoration, stringing them into necklaces and earrings (Timbrook, 2007). The Chumash today use tea made from the rose petals to relieve symptoms of colic and constipation and as a wash for sore eyes (Timbrook, 2007). The fruits are still used by tribes for food, drink and medicines (reference).

Status

Wetland Indicator: FAC, found in wetland and non-wetland sites (USDA-NRCS, 2019).

Weedy or Invasive: California wildrose should only be planted where it will be a desirable component of the flora, because its lateral spread through rhizomes and upright thorny stems mean that under moist conditions it is very competitive. This plant may become weedy or invasive in some regions or habitats and may displace desirable vegetation if not properly managed. Please consult with your local NRCS Field Office, Cooperative Extension Service office, state natural resource, or state agriculture department regarding its status and use. Please consult the PLANTS Web site (<http://plants.usda.gov/>) and your state's Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g., threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

Planting Guidelines

California wildrose can be planted from seed with a recommended rate of 13.6 lbs./acre drilled to a depth of ¼-½ inch. Seeding is recommended prior to or with fall rains in California. Further irrigation may be required during the establishment phase, but once established in a suitable area, further irrigation should not be required (Gill and Pogge, 1974; Young, 2001). California wildrose is also easy to establish from container grown plants and rhizomes, assuming adequate irrigation is provided during the establishment phase (Alpert et al., 1999; Young, 2001).

Management

California wildrose may need to be constrained from widespread lateral growth. The shoots can be pruned back heavily and will still resprout from underground rhizomes.

Pests and Potential Problems

California wildrose is resistant to many common pests and diseases of rose species. It is not regulated or listed as a host for Sudden Oak Death, although the closely related Woods Rose is regulated as a host (USDA APHIS, 2019).



Figure 2. Stem of California wildrose showing thick based compressed prickles. Lockeford Plant Materials Center (October 2018).

Environmental Concerns

There are no known environmental concerns associated with California wildrose.

Control

Please contact your local agricultural extension specialist or county weed specialist to learn what works best in your area and how to use it safely. Always read label and safety instructions for each control method. Trade names and control measures appear in this document only to provide specific information. USDA NRCS does not guarantee or warranty the products and control methods named, and other products may be equally effective.

Seeds and Plant Production

Seeds (achenes) are collected when the mature hips are bright red and the internal seeds are hard and dry. Seeds are removed from dried fruits by hand or extracted by macerating the hips in water and removing the flesh from the hips. The seeds may be planted immediately or dried and stored, although stratification treatment will be required. Seedlings should be moved to a lath house or other structure in the spring and grown for one year to develop an adequate root system before transplanting. To stratify, soak the seed overnight in fresh water and cold stratify up to 3 months at 40 F (Gill and Pogge, 1974; Young, 2001). Plants can be produced by sowing fresh seed into pots or flats outdoors in October or November. Young seedlings and transplants should be maintained in a shade house over the summer, with regular irrigation. Plants should be pruned back to four nodes when they exceed the height of the container. Seedlings can be transplanted to the field in containers or as bareroot stock in the fall or spring with additional irrigation. The plants may also be propagated from stem and rhizome cuttings.



Figure 3. Mature fruits (hips) of California wildrose.

Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

Local cultivars of California wildrose include 'Elsie', collected in the foothills around Santa Barbara (Theodore Paine, 2014). Locally collected and propagated plant materials should be selected based on the local climate, resistance to local pests, and intended use. Consult with your local land grant university, local extension or local USDA NRCS office for recommendations on adapted cultivars for use in your area.

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Citation

Smither-Kopperl, M.L. 2021. Plant Guide for California wildrose (*Rosa californica*). USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, Lockeford Plant Materials Center. Lockeford, CA 95237.

Published: March 2021

Edited: 12Jan2021 hld

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