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Beat the Heat in a Moonlight Garden

by Marcia Goldstein, Master Gardener

For much of the year in the Central Valley and its foothill communities it is too hot to be out in our gardens during the daytime. Who wants to stroll around or sit outside when the temperature is over 100 degrees? Here is a way to take advantage of the cooler evenings and enjoy a special kind of garden often overlooked: the Moonlight Garden.

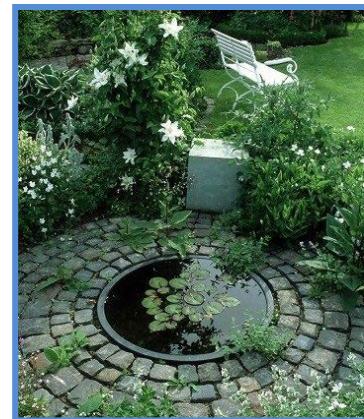
How is a Moonlight Garden different from other gardens? What pollinators does it depend on? What plants and garden accessories might you find there?

Moonlight Gardens have flowers and foliage that reflect light from the moon and stars and that have a noticeable fragrance. The nighttime pollinators must find plants in the dark. People are drawn to these garden features as they refresh themselves in the cool hush of a summer night. You may already have many elements to make a Moonlight Garden. You could enhance existing plantings or start a new garden. For our gardening area all it takes are:



White flowers reflect the moonlight at night.

- Plants with white or other pale colored flowers such as summer phlox (*Phlox paniculata*), cosmos (*Cosmos bipinnatus* ‘Sonata White’), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), or vining moonflower (*Ipomoea alba*);
- Plants with silvery gray foliage for example artemesia (*Artemesia* ‘Powis Castle’), Lamb’s Ears (*Stachys byzantine*), California fuchsia (*Epilobium* ‘Everett’s Choice’), Snow-in-summer (*Cerastium tomentosum*), or one of the many succulents (*Agave* or *Dudleya*);
- Lovely smelling flowers such as those found on gardenia (*Gardenia jasminoides*), jasmine (*Jasminum polyanthum*), Mock Orange (*Philadelphus coronaries* or “Belle Etoile.”), or white roses such as the climber ‘White Dawn’;
- Accessories like a silver gazing ball or a reflecting pond or bird bath; and
- A bench and a path (make sure there is nothing to trip a night stroller).



A small pond and white accessories reflect the light of the moon.

You may be surprised by the number of creatures who are actively visiting flowers at night. They are not your usual dainty butterflies, colorful hummingbirds or busy bees. Look instead for bats that are drawn especially to cacti and gray-leaved agaves. Moths pollinate a variety of plants and one, the yucca moth is completely co-dependent on the yucca plant – one couldn't live without the other. Other pollinators include flies, gnats, and beetles. Keep night pollinators in mind if you use any insecticides in your garden. You may not see them but lively “good” insects are important for a thriving Moonlight Garden.



Colorful moths can be seen at night lapping nectar and pollinating flowers

To get started on planting your Moonlight Garden walk in your garden after dark. Find an open area without moon shadows from trees. Take a fresh look at the flowers and foliage you already have and decide what plants and accessories to add that will enhance your own Moonlight Garden. Create a slightly curved pathway that winds around to various areas of your yard. Create a place or two to pause and admire. Sometimes you need to add a cozy nook and other times you need to open up an enclosed area to let the moonlight penetrate. Feature birdbaths, fountains, statuary, stepping stones, trellises, and other objects that reflect light.

Get ready to have a cool, enchanting experience right in your own backyard regardless of the summer daytime temperatures.

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