



## Change Is Good, Right?

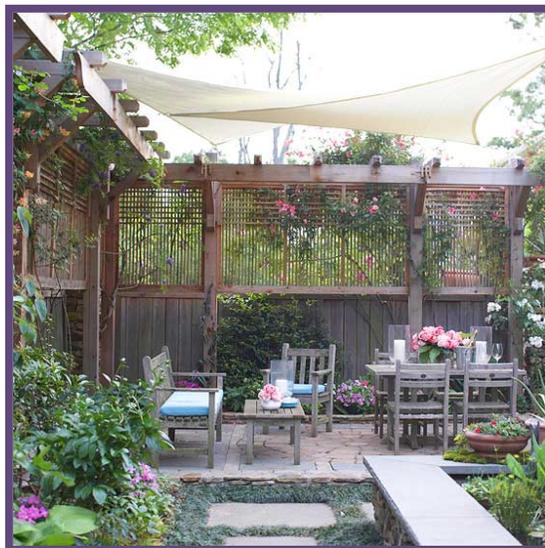
by Beverly Servadio, UC Master Gardener

We've all looked at magazines and books filled with photos of outdoor gathering spaces. We love the vibrant flowers, lush trees and shrubs, and have dreamed of yards "just like that." Some of us can achieve that look, some of us "try," and some of us just close the blinds and think of moving to a new location that already has that dream yard in place.

Take a deep breath and step outside to the area you'd like to see changed. Take notes as you consider the area. Think about what you would like to use the area for. This is an important first step. Is it the outside dining area? How about that cozy space for quiet conversations or perhaps meditation? Or will this be the area where family and friends enjoy BBQs and fun? Perhaps you need a play area for a little football or catch. Take your time on this step. Involve the family to share ideas. Be sure to note sun exposure, existing buildings or trees that may shade the area, and note where your water sources are. You will need that information for plant selection, placement and irrigation.

Do you want lots of plant life, or minimal, easy care surroundings? Remember, our current water availability is shrinking, so choosing water wise plants will help save water while still providing the look you desire. Think about including edibles in your plant choices. Fruit and citrus trees are what I call bonus plants. They have beautiful flowers, provide food to eat, and the scent of citrus blossoms will perfume the area. Visit nurseries often throughout the year to observe how the plants change with the seasons. Look for nurseries that actually have the plant in which you are interested, within the landscape of their grounds. This will help in your decision of whether that particular plant is going to work in your landscape. Talk to nursery staff and note the mature plant size. A beautiful plant in a one gallon container may grow to be too large for the intended area. Check on the availability of a dwarf variety if the standard size will be too big for the space at maturity.

Within the landscape, you may want to consider surfaces to walk on or seating areas. Reclaimed bricks, repurposed or new concrete, stones, gravels, pavers, or ground covers that can tolerate being walked on are choices to think about.



Landscape design



Patio with water wise plants

How about structures? Longing for the covered patio or shaded area? Think about bringing plant life to these areas. Container gardens can be an easy care option. Speaking of structures, is this space going to be an extension of your living area, or a domain of its own? Furnishing it might consist of coordinating an existing inside style to the new outside area. Other ideas might be incorporating refurbished favorite pieces or fun finds at garage sales and thrift shops into your space. Maybe you'd prefer that clean, sleek look of modern outdoor sets. There are many options to consider.



Water wise dining area

My hope is this “get started” article does just that: gets you started. It will take time and effort on your part. Your dream yard may be a “do-it-yourself” over time and in small budgeted chunks, or you may want professional, outside help with some or the entire project.

The Tulare/Kings County Master Gardeners can help with questions you have. Visit us at our plant clinics and garden festivals. Our website is a great resource. Find us at: [http://ucanr.edu/sites/UC\\_Master\\_Gardeners/](http://ucanr.edu/sites/UC_Master_Gardeners/)

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