



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Gardening Challenges (May 21, 2022)

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Planning and planting your garden while imagining how it will look in the future is creative and fun. Sometimes challenges happen to challenge your vision. These can include pest invasions, plants failing to thrive, or things beyond your control, such as the weather. What can you do to prevail over these challenges?

Some options to help plants recover

For pest problems from aphids to gophers, the UC IPM resources accessible through the Master Gardener website offers science-based solutions. Whether you know the critter invading your space or are only seeing evidence of their attack, you can access information by pests or plant type. Under plants, there will also be a list of abiotic problems not related to pests, which can occur with that particular plant, including diseases such as powdery mildew or symptoms of nutrient deficiencies.



If you are consulting the Master Gardeners on the phone line or at an outreach event, we tend to ask you many questions. A primary question I ask is if anything has changed in the garden or yard. Did you adopt a new pet? Especially in a new home, pets explore and are curious about their surroundings. Some plants tolerate a bit of digging or damage, but some can be overwhelmed.

A change in sun or shade available is a major stressor for many plants. A tree or large shrub removed or a new structure blocking the sun may have occurred months before you noted the changes to the garden. At the Tulare County Courthouse rose gardens, a set of solar panels shades one of the rose gardens for part of the day. We have been observing the plants for a year so far, and while they may have some fewer blooms, the angle of the sun still allows for sufficient sunlight to keep them growing. In the wilting heat of summer, those plants looked less stressed than in the fully exposed gardens. However, some plants may need to be relocated to another site when the season is appropriate to do this. Less than 6 hours of sunlight per day will not be sufficient for some plants to have lush, vegetative growth or full flower bloom.

If the plant is receiving more sun than usual and it is the heat of summer, setting up a shade cloth or umbrella can provide a nicer environment. Also, check your irrigation timers, lines, and settings, as a power outage may have reset the programming. Use a moisture meter near the base of the plant--the surface may seem dry, but the roots might be too wet.

Check around the root zone of failing plants

Is the soil totally dry or very wet with pooled water or a sulfur smell? Gophers and voles will chew irrigation lines diverting water away from plants, leaving the resulting leaky tubing to cause excess water elsewhere. Damage to the main irrigation line from equipment may not be obvious on the soil surface but could be flooding the root zone, impeding oxygen to the roots. Mushrooms growing in the area indicate soggy soil.

Are there obvious pest problems such as nematodes attached to the roots? Are the roots healthy, with little root filaments, or dry and brittle?

A wait-and-see approach, along with making some accommodations for the plant, such as providing a shade cover for a plant previously in the shade and now in full sun or adjusting the irrigation, may return the plant to good health.

If the challenge has overwhelmed the plant, how can you prevent a recurrence?

Evaluate the site in terms of sun and shade, drainage, existing plants and trees, and ease of irrigation. In selecting plants, think about gardener issues such as time to care for plants requiring a lot of attention to thrive or the ability to perform the labor needed for a plant to look its best.



Soil testing can be done for pH, nutrients, and trace elements. Home test kits are fairly inexpensive, but the accuracy varies. A commercial laboratory will provide an accurate analysis, but they are more costly. Home tests that can provide helpful information include squeezing a handful of soil to check how it clumps together, dig a hole and measure how long it takes to drain, look for worms in the dug-up soil, and test for soil pH with a test kit or probe.

Planting in containers is easier on the gardener and can protect the plants from pests and environmental issues. Pots set out on the porch are easier to monitor for pest invasion, can be moved for sun or frost protection and provide herbs or vegetables close to the kitchen.

There are great resources for creating a plant list for your garden

Native plants are adapted to the area and are drought tolerant. Choosing plants native to your garden location and environmental situation is key. The California Native Plant Society site <https://calscape.org> creates a list of native plant choices based on your plant preferences and location.

The Master Gardener website has lists of trees, shrubs, plants for the Central Valley and an archive of newspaper articles with seasonal tips and plant descriptions to tempt you to find new plant favorites.

Water Use Classification of Landscape Species: <https://ucanr.edu/sites/WUCOLS/> provides evaluations of the irrigation water needs for over 3500 plant groups used in California landscapes. You can search by specific plant name or by region. For our area, the Bakersfield or Fresno lists are the options.

These sites will provide details on the mature size, drought tolerance, sun/shade requirements and provide a list of tree, shrub or plant choices. It's a great way to learn new options for your garden and plan for the future.

Gardens are always a work in progress.

Learning new information, such as plant selection best suited to your site or cultural care to produce the garden of your dreams, is a good starting point. Working around unavoidable challenges makes us more well-rounded gardeners. Imagine how you will feel next year having met the challenge and created a lovely garden. The Master Gardeners love to talk about plants, so do discuss your garden challenges with us. Our contact and event locations are on the Master Gardener home page and at the end of the article. We want to hear about your successes also.