



Drought Tolerant Plants



While we all need to work to reduce water use in the landscape, gardening in dry conditions does not mean reducing yards to barren concrete slabs with occasional potted cacti. Instead, reducing lawn areas and devoting more space to ground-covers, shrubs and trees that are drought tolerant is a solution that is visually pleasing and provide a host of environmental and economic benefits. Gardens with low water requirements can include a diverse array of colorful and interesting plants.

One group of plants suited to our climate's low precipitation is the wide assortment of native California plants. Native species have evolved and adapted to the local weather over thousands of years. In their native habitat, they are tolerant of seasonal extremes, having adapted to survive winter cold and summer heat, periodic drought, wildfires, coastal conditions and high winds. Once established, many native species require little or no additional irrigation beyond normal rainfall. Be aware, however, that some California native plants used for landscaping originate in the relatively cool, moist climate of the coast or in the Sierra Nevada foothills, making them susceptible to drought and prone to injury when grown in warmer and drier areas of the state. For more information about native plants, visit California Native Plant Society's website at <http://cnps.org>.

Another group of California-friendly plants are from the Mediterranean-climate regions. This includes species from the Mediterranean Basin, South Africa, Australia, and Chile. These plants use water conserving techniques that allow them to withstand long, hot summers.

When using non-native plants, care must be taken to choosing a species that will not escape into the wild and displace native species.

There are other sources of information about drought-tolerant plants such as the U.C. Davis Arboretum list of "All Stars," a research and practice-based compilation of 100 plants that do best in central California. Their web site, <http://arboretum.ucdavis.edu>, has a "water needs" search category that is very useful.

Most drought tolerant plants need to be well established - growing for a year - before they are drought tolerant. All plants require a steady supply of moisture about one year after they are first planted. When planted, water plants weekly for the first year; after that they can grow with just an occasional watering.

There are many resources to find plants that are drought tolerant and would do well here in the Sacramento Valley; just two of many are mentioned above. However, here is a list of just a few plants that would do well in a drought tolerant garden in the Sacramento Valley:

Shrubs. Oregon Grape; ceanothus; lavender; lantana; salvias; red-twig dogwood; fuchsia-flowered gooseberry; western spice bush; daphne

Perennials and self-sowing annuals. California poppy; monkey flower; California fuchsia; penstemon; iris.

Grasses and ground-covers. Emerald Carpet Manzanita; deer grass.

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