

Is it Spring Yet? Let's Hope So!

by Carolyn Meiers



In the Lake Tahoe basin we have an average of 120-150 days between the last frost in the spring and the first frost in the fall. When you factor in an average 80 "growing" days, that allow for the air to be truly warmed for plant growth, all gardeners need to get serious, especially when we often have a very short spring. Planning ahead is important!

Before the plants are purchased, start to think as an artist would. A pleasing garden includes art design elements of line, shape, color, texture and contrast. Fragrance and trickling water from fountains are bonuses not possible on the artist's canvas.

Draw a rough sketch of what you envision, and keep the above elements in mind, along with the names of plants you'd love to have. If you see something you like in a magazine or even someone else's garden, try it. Gardening is never really a finished work of art. It's constantly being changed and refined by the gardener and by Mother Nature. A plan will help cut down unnecessary buying mistakes, but don't stress about the finished project. Enjoy the process.

Getting started motto: "Plan your work, then work your plan" (plants).

- Be patient. Remember to wait until at somewhere between Memorial Day and June 15th in the Tahoe basin for planting annuals and most flowers. Even then, keep some covering materials handy for those chances of light frost.
- Sketch out your plot and location of beds.
- Consider shade/sun, soil acidity/alkalinity and microclimates. Microclimate factors are local variations in elevation, direction of exposure, slopes, soil, density of vegetation, wind effects, etc.
- Think about using native plants and hardy adapted introduced plants like lilacs, dogwood, Shasta daisies, and columbine, to name just a few.
- Know the zones for plant hardiness. Our area is generally listed as Zone 2 for the lower elevations around the lake and Zone 1 for the slightly higher elevations. When in doubt about a plant's hardiness for your area, take advice from some of the trusted nursery personnel where you are buying in the area or ask a Master Gardener.
- Modifying the soil is covered in a separate article in this newsletter. Be sure to read it.
- Create a budget by estimating the cost of hardscape (paths, patios, planters) and then the trees, shrubs, lawn and flowers.
- Plant in groups of threes, fives, sevens or more. Avoid using just one kind of kind annuals or perennials.
- Protect our lake. Think about and observe our BMPs (Best Management Practices). For more information check with the Master Gardener office. We also offer advice on the use of pesticides and fertilizers.
- Make a list of plants and supplies needed. Take it with you to shop so you can avoid the "kid in the candy store" syndrome. Also, be sure to choose a quality nursery/garden center and you will have less plant failure.

Your garden is waiting. Let's get growing!