



# WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPING?

*Elaine Kelly Applebaum, Placer County Master Gardener*

The concept of sustainability, once vague and maybe even a little revolutionary, now seems to have permeated our mainstream culture. It speaks to a way of living that meets the needs and goals of people today while ensuring future generations will be able to enjoy that same lifestyle. It addresses human standards of living and economic viability in light of the fact we live in a world of complex ecosystems and limited natural resources.

What does sustainability have to do with gardening? **What we do in our home gardens can greatly impact the greater environment, for better or worse.** By making the right choices of what to grow and how to care for our landscapes, we can make a positive difference, not only in the health of the environment, but in our own health as well, now and into the future.

As Placer County Master Gardeners we aim to help you choose regionally appropriate plants and to care for them in sustainable ways. We are guided in our efforts by the University of California Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources (UCANR) Strategic Vision 2025 which calls for Healthy Environments, Healthy Food Systems, Healthy Communities and Healthy Californians. Sustainable landscaping practices support these initiatives; let's take a look at them:

## Choose Appropriate Plants

- Look for Arboretum All-Stars and plants native to California and similar Mediterranean climates. Locally adapted plants require less water and are healthier, requiring fewer chemical inputs
- Match mature plant size to the space available to reduce pruning and waste sent to the landfill
- Don't plant invasive species

## Nurture Your Soil

- Apply compost to feed beneficial soil organisms; they in turn will "feed" your plants
- Don't add nutrients unless a soil test shows a deficiency. More is NOT better
- Use natural soil amendments when necessary instead of synthetic fertilizers
- Avoid compacting your soil
- Prevent erosion
- Use cover crops or mulch to protect bare soil
- Recycle yard waste by composting to reduce the amount sent to the landfill

## Conserve Water

- Use mulch
- Irrigate for soil type, plant need and climate

- Monitor, maintain and manage irrigation systems
- Minimize turf lawn or remove it entirely
- Hydrozone: group plants by water use
- Collect rainwater

## Manage Pests Responsibly

- Choose the least-toxic methods for insect, disease and weed control. Bookmark [ipm.ucanr.edu](http://ipm.ucanr.edu) and refer to it for up-to-date information on Integrated Pest Management
- Protect human and environmental health by properly applying chemicals when needed
- Know which insects are beneficial and protect them

## Create and Protect Wildlife Habitat

- Use native plants and biodiverse plantings
- Avoid pesticide use
- Plant flowers that will provide pollen and nectar for bees, butterflies and hummingbirds.
- Provide water and shelter
- Conserve or restore natural areas and wildlife corridors

## Implement Sustainable Design Elements

- "Slow the flow" with berms, dry stream beds or raingardens to keep rainwater on site and allow for groundwater recharge
- Use pervious concrete or soft set pavers for patios, walks and driveways for even more water infiltration
- Use salvaged and recycled materials when possible
- Beware of fire danger and create defensible space

## Grow Your Own Fruits and Vegetables

- Enjoy the health benefits of outdoor exercise and the freshest, healthiest food by growing your own.
- Reduce transportation fuel use and air pollution by eating home grown or locally grown food

## Conserve Energy

- Plant deciduous trees on the west and south sides of your house to reduce cooling costs in summer and let in light and heat in the winter
- Shade paved areas and air conditioners
- Design landscapes that require less pruning, mowing, blowing and use of power equipment

## Reduce Chemical Inputs

- Support birds, toads and predatory insects instead of using pesticides to manage insect pests
- If you have a lawn, use a mulching mower to grass-cycle instead of using fertilizer
- Avoid high nitrogen and quick-release fertilizers to protect water quality and soil life