



ON BEYOND SUMMER

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The rains have come and gone. Dry, still air hangs over the landscape. The woods seem empty. The insects and birds that were abundant a month ago have vanished.

The long, rainless summer and fall of California's Mediterranean climate causes the cycle of life in the native landscape to fall into a summer slumber.

Once the summer temperatures reach 86°F and above, plant leaves begin to change. The tissues develop increased lignin. This makes the foliage unpalatable to insects and deer.

The well-watered garden, however, provides a banquet of succulent, nutrient-rich food for all the pests.

What is a gardener to do?

- Adapt to the California summer using plants that thrive, rather than hoping they survive on beyond summer.
- Reduce the use of thirsty, temperate plants, especially lawns.
- When water is applied less frequently, the habitat for many bothersome pests is reduced or eliminated.

Home gardening choices have real environmental impacts.

Gardeners dispose of 1.5 million tons of leaves and grass trimmings per year. The collection, transportation and processing of green waste takes large amounts of energy and creates air pollution.

- Careful choices in the selection and planting of landscape plants will minimize or eliminate the need for trimming.
- Compost the green waste produced in your landscape on site.
- Water efficient plants will reduce the use of electricity that is needed to pump, treat and transport water.
- Soil adapted plants reduce the need to add fertilizers and mined minerals.
- Less fertilizer, either organic or synthetic, reduces runoff into groundwater and streams. Gardeners can help to keep sources of water clean.

Not all choices are easy to make.

Mediterranean plants are climate adapted, water thrifty, pest resistant, but need neutral to alkaline soils. They are excellent choices for the western and southernmost areas of Placer and Nevada Counties.

Gardeners in the higher foothills have mild to very acid soils. Successful cultivation of non- native, Mediterranean plants requires the addition of calcium to the soil.

- Calcium is a mined mineral that comes from oyster shells on the sea bottom or dolomite strip mines.
- Dolomite-rock sites in the San Bernardino Mountains are noted for the habitat that now is endangered by mining.'

Avoid planting invasive plants.

They often use more water, crowd out natives and are costly to landowners and the taxpayers to control. Check the California Invasive Plant Pest Council (Cal-IPC) list for your area.

Visit botanic gardens for examples of plants that do well in your location. Make lists of plants that support wildlife and fill the functions that you want in your landscape.

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Summer can be a time for rest and reflection. Admire your landscape from the shady spot under a tree. Develop a California garden. Use climate and soil-adapted native and non-native plants. You'll be on beyond summer, relaxed and smiling.

References

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