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Deer and Drought – Oh, No! (Oh yes!)
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One of the things you learn living in the foothills is that deer will sample just about anything growing in our yards, devouring some in the process. And our area has water issues. Is it possible, you might ask, to landscape with plants that deer don't like and that are less thirsty? Yes it is!

This October, I visited with a friend who has many unfenced acres in the foothills (elevation 1800 ft) but some of the most pleasing landscaped areas, teeming with bees of different types. The drive in has greenery on both sides with some plants still in bloom.

Some of the many plants that are both deer resistant and less thirsty are - (full sun): lavenders, rosemary, salvias, oregano, thyme, germander, euphorbias, yarrow, California fuchsia, wild buckwheats, lavender cotton, grasses, toyon, sedums; (partial shade under trees) cotoneaster, lilacs, dogwoods; (shade, part shade): ferns, coral bells and sweet woodruff. Not all of these are natives since many of the Mediterranean areas of the world yield plants that will be happy in our foothills.

Many of the following plants, once established, will require low to moderate watering. The least thirsty plants are rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*), germander (*Teucrium*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), euphorbia (a gray-bluish favorite is *Euphorbia myrsinites*), lavender cotton (*Santolina chamaecyparissus*), oregano (*Origanum vulgare*, many varieties), wild buckwheats (*Eriogonum*, many varieties), grasses such as Blue Fescue (*Festuca glauca*) and Deer Grass or Pink Deer Grass (*Muhlenbergia rigens* or *Muhlenbergia capillaries*), and as a groundcover, sedums, like Jenny's Stonecrop (*Sedum reflexum* or *Sedum rupestre*). Some, such as the shrubs, Toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*) and California fuchsia (*Epilobium canum*), benefit from deep watering twice a month in the hottest part of the summer.

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Planting in the fall, these all need to become established with varying needs of water the first year. Grouping together those with more need from those with less need of water is good management practice for saving watering time and money. And they should be protected from deer and other hungry wildlife until their roots have grown in. For example, a small bit of fencing may be needed around small plugs of creeping thyme (*Thymus serpyllum*), which can grow down a slope in a year or two, to keep rabbits and deer from just pulling up for a little taste test. Cages, even tomato cages, around the larger plants can be removed after a few weeks once those roots have grown securely. Rather than larger plants, it is good to start with smaller sizes which will have a better chance of settling in to your particular soil than older ones which may be root bound in their nursery pots.

Keep in mind that many of these plants will be much larger by their third year or more. Avoid putting in too many plants too closely. Many of these are slower growing but if you have patience, you may be rewarded, for example, with a California fuchsia that has expanded to 3 feet by 6 feet. This plant, as well as oreganos, look best by having their flower stalks being cut back at the base by early winter so that they flower well next spring and summer. If you are wondering just how big some of these plants will get, you may find them in the Sherwood Demonstration Garden as mature plants.

The Sherwood Demonstration Garden is open the 2nd Saturday of each month (except during inclement weather) from November through March, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, behind Folsom Lake College – El Dorado Center. Of the 16 separate areas of this garden, the Mediterranean and the Native gardens likely will have many of the aforementioned plants growing happily. Each has been labeled with an indication of their water needs as well as their deer resistance. What a great way to see what might work in your unfenced area to try your hand at the bravest form of gardening in our area – planting in a deer's backyard!

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news. You can also find us on Facebook.