

Help Desk FAQs

Summer 2022

Question 3 - We removed our old lawn and are now ready to plant a water-wise garden. In the planting space we have full sun and part shade areas and have a drip system set-up for adding drip lines. Please give us some ideas of what, where and when to plant.

Answer 3

Congratulations on getting rid of your lawn! We have lots of water-wise plant ideas, but before you choose plants, it is important to have a plan for your garden. What do you want to see when you look out on your yard: flowering plants, green plants, trees or a combination? Do you want to include seating, a walkway or space to plant edibles? Would you like to attract pollinators? Once you have an idea of what you want, we recommend measuring your space, and then drawing a rough sketch of where you might want trees, shrubs, annuals, or ground cover and any hardscape (pavers, benches, etc). Be sure to note where your space gets full to part sun, and where you have mostly shade.

Now for the fun part. Many Mediterranean plant species and most California native plant species work very well in Yolo County. Native plants are especially well suited to our native, mostly clay soil. Some people have the impression that native plants are not colorful or attractive, but we can assure you that is not the case. And, they are definitely drought tolerant.

One of the best resources for choosing native plants is Calscape, a website developed by the California Native Plant Society (CNPS, see the link below)¹. On this website, you can type in a zip code and find plants by category (trees, shrubs, annuals, sun, shade) that are native to your location. You can also navigate to their garden planner,² where you answer a few questions and get a list of native plants that meet your specifications. CNPS provides lists of local nurseries that stock native plants, too. The UC Davis Arboretum is another good source of native plant information.³

A few of our favorite native perennial species that work well in our area include Ceanothus (Ca wild lilac), Arctostaphyllum (manzanita), Cercis occidentalis (Western redbud), Asclepius (milkweed), Eriogonum (buckwheat), Salvia (colorful native sages), Epilobium (Ca fuchsia), Solidago velutina (Ca goldenrod), Erigeron Wayne Roderick (seaside daisy), Sisyrinchium vellum (blue-eyed grass) and many other native trees, shrubs, annual wildflowers, and grasses. All of these species and many others provide colorful flowers, support for native bees and other insects, and attract birds. Many California natives are wonderfully scented, too.

The best time to plant is in the fall, but you can also plant February - April as long as you are willing to take extra care through the summer to irrigate them weekly or twice weekly until they are established. Make sure you pay attention to the drainage needs of your plants, too.

Happy planting!

1. <https://www.calscape.org/>
2. <https://gardenplanner.calscape.org/>
3. <https://arboretum.ucdavis.edu/sustainable-gardening-toolkit>