

Digging Deep-Gardening with Cynthia Brian

Don't Doubt the Drought

"Somewhere between right and wrong, there is a garden. I will meet you there." – Rumi

Hurray for the rain! How happy we have been to utilize our umbrellas for the recent April showers. But don't confuse this limited precipitation with full reservoirs. The recent downpours were only a trickle. The snowpack remains at only 30 percent of necessary and the water level in our lakes hovers around 50 percent of normal. Don't doubt this drought. It is here to stay and we have to adjust to the coming season of dry weather. Conservation is critical.

Do you know what xeriscaping is? Although some people have nicknamed the system "zero-scaping," nothing could be further from the truth. Xeriscaping is a beneficial way to conserve water while maintaining a beautiful garden. Gardens may contain cacti and succulents, but many other drought tolerant specimens are also included. Plants with similar water requirements are grouped together and the use of the plot is considered. Areas for relaxing, eating, playing, sitting, and privacy are part of the plan. Trees and shrubs are positioned to provide heating and cooling while curved wide swaths are encouraged for easier water efficiency. The resulting benefit of xeriscaping is a low maintenance garden that is drought resistant, water conserving, and a habitat for wildlife. Water usage may be reduced by as much as 50-75 percent.

There is no right or wrong in the garden, but this year, we definitely must be water conscious.

Drought Gardening Series – Part 2

Next Steps

PLANT WISELY

Maintenance, not growth, is the goal of gardeners during a drought. If you must plant, decide on drought-tolerant plants instead of thirsty ones. In general, plants that can survive the dry times have leaves that are thick, small, glossy, fuzzy, or silver-grey. Be aware of exposure. Don't mix flowerbeds with plants that have different needs. Hot, dry areas with south or west exposures require more water while east and north facing gardens retain their moisture longer. Natives and desert plants drink less. Plant now while the weather is cooler and refrain from planting during the warmer months. Consider vegetables that will give you the biggest bang for your water buck such as tomatoes, beans, artichokes, eggplant, peppers, squash, Swiss Chard, lettuces, and cucumbers while eliminating choices that produce just one crop like cauliflower.

PLANT CLOSE TOGETHER

Learn from the Native Americans who planted "Three Sisters" including corn, beans, and squash. According to Iroquois legend, corn, beans, and squash are three inseparable sisters who grow and thrive together. The beans provide nitrogen, the corn is a trellis where beans can grow, and the prickly foliage of the squash keep the corn worms away in a sustainable system that has been used throughout history. Instead of organizing your garden in rows, plant in close knit squares or swaths to pack the punch in small places. Use tall plants as canopies of shade. In the fall, add a cover crop mix to protect and fertilize garden beds after harvest.



Pretty, prickly, and great in drought plantings. Just don't fall in it! Cleistocactus hyalacanthus (white-spined columnar cactus)
Photos Cynthia Brian

DEADHEAD REGULARLY

Don't allow seeds or pods to form as they zap energy and use more water to form the seeds. By deadheading, you'll keep the juices flowing. Do not prune heavily as water-deprived plants are stressed and may not have the capacity to heal the pruned branches resulting in death. Pruning encourages side shoots and stimulates growth, which is not what you are seeking in a drought. Deadheading just the spent flowers is the key to keeping your plants alive.

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