

Planning a successful garden – important questions to answer!

How much sun is there?

Full sun Dappled shade Full shade

How hot is the site?

Over 100° F frequently rarely

How cold is the site?

Below 32° F frequently rarely

Snow coverage? Ice?

Never seldom for long periods

Water sources?

Automated Spray Drip Hose Bucket Marsh Desert Other

Wind?

Frequent seldom from one direction strength

Air pollutants?

Duststorms sandstorms salt air smog

Elevation?

Below or at sea level up to 5000 feet above 5000 feet

Topography?

Flat hillside streamside/curbside/drainage channel cliff-face/skyscrapers knolls

Soil?

Clay sand silt gravel rocky loam planter's mix contaminated

Soil pH?

Acid – less than 6 alkaline – greater than 8 neutral – 7

Soil drainage?

Poor - water takes hours to drain into soil or drains too fast

Good – water drains into soil in about 10 to 15 minutes, no standing water

Proximity to walls?

Concrete/stucco makes soil alkaline Wood siding may rot

Aluminum or glass walls may reflect too much heat or light

Large root systems may tear up foundations

Proximity to underground structures?

Deep-rooted (shrubs & trees penetrate sewers, septic tanks, joints in water mains)

Proximity to permanent plantings (Street trees, hedges, windbreaks, golf courses, etc.)

City or homeowner association regulations or guidelines? (May restrict the types or species of plants used in front yards or in landscaping, though variances may be granted).

Selecting the appropriate native plants for your garden

1. Go to a park with native plants, a native plant botanic garden or a wild area with native plants near where you live or search the web for websites of local native plant nurseries.
2. Look for groupings of native plants – trees, tall and small shrubs, perennials, annuals, grasses and vines – that live in about the same conditions as exist in your garden site, i.e. same sun, temperature cycle, weather, elevation range, soil, soil drainage, topography.
3. Always ask at the nursery:
 - where the native plants came from,
 - how big they grow (both above and below ground),
 - how much space they need,
 - when to plant them,
 - what soil and pH is best,
 - whether or not you need to fertilize them,
 - how much sun or shade they need,
 - how much water?

Note: Questions are good, and ignorance is bad when choosing which plants suit the site. Do not plant an alpine flower in a sea-level front yard or a desert shrub by the Pacific Ocean!

4. Note that the amount of water required will be less for native plants in general, except for native plants growing naturally in wet areas and for native plants in containers.
5. Automated watering is not recommended for native plant gardens unless the native plants are in containers or come from marshes. Generally deep-watering once per week for the first three years establishes healthy native plant root systems in gardens, then no water unless soil is dry at root level.
6. Plants in containers will require weekly watering unless the climate is naturally moist. Winds around skyscrapers dry out balcony or rooftop container plantings as well as covering them with dust, so these plants need more attention.
7. Native plants often have extensive root systems. If a native plant is to be planted in a container, ask how long it takes that native plant species to outgrow the pot.
8. Using a range of container sizes, a native plant community may be designed with shrubs, annuals, and perennials to attract butterflies and birds.
9. During hard frosts or wintry weather cover the plants (unless snow is covering them) and insulate the containers to keep the roots from freezing (unless the native plant roots endure freezing naturally).
10. Locally appropriate native plant community structures, which may include trees, tall shrubs, small shrubs, annuals, perennials, grasses, and/or vines are perfect for attracting local and/or migratory fauna - providing welcome resting, nesting and feeding opportunities.