

July 2020 Gardener's Corner
By Cate White, SJ County Master Gardener

Here in our part of California, July and August are the hottest months of the year. Coupled with the fact that the northern California rainy season runs from mid September to mid May, this is also the driest time of the year. We rely on winter rains, snow run-off from the Sierras and underground aquifers to supply our water needs. Underground aquifers have been over-drawn for many years, and offer diminishing water availability, while the snows in the Sierras vary widely from year to year. This year, the recorded snowfall in the Sierras was 57% of average. Luckily, the previous two years had above average and average precipitation, so we still have reasonably good water supplies in our reservoirs. But future rain/snowfall is uncertain. Living in California means using water wisely, and often sparingly, since drought is always on the horizon. In fact, this year, the National Integrated Drought Information System classifies our area as being under moderate drought conditions.

So, what does this mean for those of us who love to garden? Practicing water conscious gardening doesn't necessarily mean we are limited to growing succulents and cactus; there are many plants that have low to moderate water requirements. The University of California Cooperative Extension provides two good resources for finding appropriate plants to grow in our area. WUCOLS (Water Use Classification of Landscape Species) offers a website that allows you to research plants name or by type (such as groundcover), giving water use needs for each. The Arboretum All Stars web site is a listing of plants that thrive in our area. Both usually have pictures and cultural information that can help you decide if a particular plant fills your needs. All the plants pictured in this column come from the All Stars site. Another good resource is the Sunset Western Garden Book. You will find many attractive options using these resources.



Rosa x odorata Mutabilis
Butterfly Rose



Hunnemannia fumariifolia
Mexican Tulip Poppy



Echeveria x imbricata
Hens and Chicks



Zephyranthes candida
Argentine Rain Lily

The following are some helpful tips for managing water in your yard.

- Be familiar with your irrigation system. Know how to set up your watering program, and review it regularly. Check often for broken lines, misdirected sprinkler heads and faulty valves.
- Drip irrigation and soaker hoses are the most efficient for annual, vegetable, and perennial beds as well as trees. Be sure to water trees and shrubs at the “drip line”, not on their trunks, which can cause rot.
- Rotor sprinkler heads are best for lawns. To be sure that your lawn is watered evenly, try the “tuna can test”. Place tuna cans in strategic locations around your lawn, then run the sprinklers. After the sprinkling cycle, check the cans to see how much water is in each one. If the amount in each can varies greatly, adjust your sprinkler heads to get more even water distribution.



Rotor Sprinkler recommended for lawns

- Plants in raised beds or pots need more water than those on the ground level.
- Try to place plants with similar watering requirements in the same watering zone. If this is not possible, it might help to add more drip lines to thirstier plants or use drippers with a higher water flow rating.
- Manteca generally has sandy loam soil, which dries out more quickly than the clay soils found in most areas of California. Use a screwdriver to measure the moisture in your soil. It should be damp to a depth of 2 inches.
- Adding compost helps retain soil moisture. Mulching with bark or compost to a depth of 2 to 4 inches also helps, but keep bark away from trunks of trees and shrubs to avoid rot. Compost makes a good mulch for vegetable and flower beds.
- Keep beds free from water hungry weeds.

Follow city of Manteca Water Conservation Guidelines.

- Residences with odd numbered addresses can water Wednesday, Friday and Sunday, while even numbered addresses may water Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. No watering is allowed Mondays, or within 48 hours of measurable rainfall. Watering early in the morning avoids excess evaporation and wind drift. The city recommends watering before 4 am or after 7 am, when water pressure is highest.
- Watering must be done before noon or after 6 pm.
- Avoid run-off. If run-off occurs, adjust your watering program. You might try a two-phase system, programming your irrigation to run for half the total time once through, then a second time an hour or more later for the other half.
- Water should never be used to hose off sidewalks, driveways, or patios.

For more information about best irrigation practices, go to: sjmastergardeners.ucanr.edu, and click on Water Conservation in the Home Landscape.

July Garden Checklist

- Mow lawn down by no more than 1/3 when weather is hot
- Monitor watering system closely, checking valves, hoses and sprinklers
- Deep water trees every week or two in hottest weather
- Prune vigorous vines such as wisteria to keep them in check
- Continue to monitor plants for disease and insect damage. Discourage insects with a sharp spray of water, neem oil, or insecticidal soap. Use neem oil on powdery mildew. Use Bt on caterpillars. Spraying should be done when bees are not present, preferably early in the morning before the heat of the day, or in the evening just after sunset.
- Put out bait if ants are invading plants