

Ruth J. Evans: You can triumph over drought

BY RUTH J. EVANS

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Take it from me: You can capture the beauty and enhance your garden or landscape during the drought.

All that is required is a little curiosity, a willingness to try new techniques and trips to your local nurseries and botanical gardens.

For example, Fresno and Clovis have places to visit that can provide home gardeners with the advice they need to become "water-wise."

The Clovis Botanical Gardens and Garden of the Sun cater events that educate people and provide them with the tools to cope with water management. Stroll along winding paths of each of these garden locations that are bordered by drought-resistant trees and shrubs. Learn how to conserve water by "asking the experts" available at their workshops to answer your questions about varieties of plants and vegetables that will use less water. They can help re-route your gardening goals or direct you to less water-demanding varieties.

Structures are also displayed at these gardens that are both innovative and ornamental. Topiaries in animal shapes and espaliers of oranges or apples are ideas that can be incorporated into your plan to renovate and renew your garden or landscape. Sculptures, containers or decorative pots can become a home gardeners' strategy to replace a large grassy lawn.

Plan a layout of your "irrigation centers" throughout your landscape. Emitters, bubblers, drip tape, manifolds and outlets are all devices used to precisely apply water to your crops and landscape. You can be a "do-it-yourself-er," get advice from the stores that distribute irrigation supplies, or hire a landscape architect to draw up your own personal plan.

Four years ago, our yard had 55 sprinkler heads to keep our grass lawn watered throughout the year! Needless to say, by taking out a large portion of our grass lawn and replacing it with less thirsty plants, shrubs and trees, we have cut down on our sprinklers.

By arranging drip irrigation lines and emitters, we have been able to supply water to specific areas without overflowing and wasting water in puddles down the gutters. By using containers for plants, we keep them portable and move the plants to where they will thrive better during different times of the year.

Choose to tour a favorite nursery around the Central Valley. Each nursery has its specialty. Roses flourish at a vintage district nursery. Another has a "country farm" venue. And one nursery has a variety of containers and fountains galore filling the entryway to its gardens from the parking lot.

Some of the nurseries have people who assist home gardeners with the necessary mulches, fertilizers and soils that are recommended for fruits, vegetables and ornamentals. Not only can they advise you in these services, they can also refer or suggest a consultant or commercial contractor that can guide you toward a more thrifty watering system.

I've been attending seminars at one of Fresno's local nurseries. Each month, packed in like oranges in an orange crate, many home gardeners have been taking advantage of its local flavors. This nursery provides a variety of seminars to improve and maintain home gardens and landscapes.

At the most recent seminar, the nursery's agenda in its "Big Squeeze" program "blended two workshops" with the bonuses of citrus sampling and salsa tasting to please any home gardener's palate.

Knowledge on how to control pests, prepare your soil and manage irrigation were emphasized during the sessions. New drought-resistant plants were introduced, revolutionary container planting devices were demonstrated and a variety of mulches were represented at each workshop. One of the most emphasized and most suggested "watchdog" devices for controlling water usage is the "digital soil moisture meter."

Most importantly, when you water, note how much water is left after a certain period of time. If it's dry, add water. If there's mud, standing water, no drainage — don't water.

Whether you're a novice or master gardener, visit a nursery or public garden in your area to learn more about how to sustain your existing ornamentals, fruits and vegetables. Maintain the "triumph" of your own garden and landscape without diminishing the enjoyment.

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