

Guidelines for Planting in a Dry Year
Native Plants for Seasonal Interest
UC Botanical Garden Class, 2014
Katherine Greenberg

California native plants are adapted to dry summers and mild winters with occasional rain. The last year (2013-14) has been the driest year on record (since 1850), and there is more interest in landscaping with native plants that require less irrigation once established. A well-designed native garden can be attractive throughout the year, with flowering plants, interest from colors and textures of foliage, fruit, and bark. Native plants also attract wildlife and pollinators to the garden.

All plants need supplemental water through the first few summers to become established. Annuals complete their growing cycle in one year, and they require moisture to germinate. Perennials grow quickly and typically show results the first year. Trees and shrubs take longer to get established, and they provide an enduring structure for a native garden. In a new garden, give priority to trees and shrubs or plant a native meadow with grasses and flowering perennials to add interest to an open area or replace a lawn. See *Growing California Native Plants* (2nd edition, UC Press) for lists of plants for different garden situations and suggestions for companion plants.

Guidelines for planting and water conservation:

1. Plant in late fall and early spring to take advantage of seasonal rainfall and cooler weather. Plan for a succession of plantings when water supplies are limited, rather than doing a large-scale planting, or plant sections of a garden.
2. Determine how much planting you can manage with limited water supplies, and use efficient irrigation (drip, spray, hand-watering). Follow planting guidelines in *Growing California Native Plants*, and water deeply when planting.
3. Mulch after planting to conserve moisture, shade and cool the soil, and discourage weeds. Organic mulch (tree chippings) can be used with most native plants, keeping it away from the root crown, and inorganic mulch (gravel) is best for succulents.
4. Provide supplemental water manually, as needed, by using an irrigation controller, a hose with an adjustable nozzle, or watering can. Water deeply and infrequently on cool or overcast days with no wind, after checking soil for moisture at the root level.
5. Boulders can be used as edges for plants and paths, and they also conserve moisture around their base for roots to tap into.
6. Use permeable paving materials (gravel, tree chippings) to conserve water on site.
7. Container plants are great for seasonal color, and they can be planted with annuals, perennials, bulbs, succulents, or a mix of plants. Try adding small rocks to a container or use a decorative container in the garden as an accent or focal point, and leave it unplanted.