

What is Sustainable Gardening?

Sustainable Gardens aim to tread more lightly on the earth by integrating better with the local environment. In addition to the functional and aesthetic goals of a landscape design, ecological factors are heavily considered and integrated. The goal of the landscape design is to see at the site as an entire system and design accordingly.

The basic concepts behind sustainable gardening include:

1. Determine the plant community that best fits the site and use that as a basis for hardscape, planting, and irrigation design. Local examples include oak woodland, coastal scrub, riparian, etc. Integrate any existing native trees or plants.
2. Zone the garden into use areas with high maintenance and water-needy plants, such as vegetable gardens, in functional areas. Usually these areas will be close to the house. Install lower maintenance planting in all other areas.
3. Reduce lawn to small, functional areas only, or eliminate lawn entirely
4. Focus on planting for habitat value, including birds, hummingbirds, butterflies, native bees, etc. Look to local natural areas for design inspiration.
5. Seek to salvage and re-use elements on-site such as concrete, wood, brick, pavingstones, plants, boulders, etc.
6. When bringing in new materials, search for recycled products, salvaged products, sustainably produced products (Such as FSC Certified lumber) and local products.
7. Seek products that have a long-term lifespan and can be recycled after their life span is over. Alternately, seek out biodegradable products.
8. Avoid using materials that have a high-energy fabrication process or require high amounts of fuel for transportation from manufacturer to site
9. Avoid using materials that are toxic, such as pressure treated wood, vinyl products including PVC pipe, and finishes with volatile organic compounds.
10. Do not use herbicides or pesticides, as they destroy the garden's natural balances. Even 'organic' products are broad spectrum and kill both the good and the bad insects. In addition, garden chemicals seep into the soil and storm drain system, polluting creeks and groundwater.

11. Irrigate responsibly. Water infrequently and deeply, either by hand or with a drip irrigation system. Drought tolerant native gardens should never be watered more frequently than once every two to four weeks. Many California natives do not require any summer watering.
12. Plan for the garden to become as self-sufficient as possible within a three-year period. Plant shrubs spaced correctly to account for future growth. Plant low maintenance species that do not require excessive pruning and watering.