

Is This The New Normal?

by Diana Pieti

We are hearing that question often these days and by some who just do not like the long days of high temperatures the last two summers. But for gardeners, there is more of a discussion and another question. Where do we go from here? What do we need to do to still have lovely flowers, homegrown vegetables, leaves that are not burned and what about our containers and hanging baskets?

We could begin this fall by getting more mulch into our soil. Run over those leaves with a lawnmower and add them all around our perennials and layer them in our raised beds. If you have those final grass clippings that have not had herbicide on them, add those too. Having more compost/mulch added has been proven to help hold water. These are the gardening tasks for this fall, but there are many more decisions to be made.

What worked for you and what didn't? As we look around there are realizations that some of our plants are simply not in the right place for those high temps. Even though tags might say six to eight hours of sun they might not be talking about temps over 100 for several days in a row. Should they be where they get a bit of shade in the hottest part of the afternoon, and how could we attain that? Planting so that we take advantage of some afternoon shade provided by bigger landscape plants might be ideal. We could move some of them if needed, but we could also rig up a frame to simply put over the top of them for a few hours and throw some shade cloth over it. If you do not have shade cloth, a white sheet will help. You could make a frame easily from PVC pipe; it is light weight and can be taken apart and stored easily.

We could do some homework and see what kinds of landscape plants would be the best for our hot and getting hotter desert climate. Think about gray colored leaves, there are so many choices, and some that work double duty as a food source for you and the pollinators that we need to invite in.

Sage and Rosemary have gray leaves and are happy with high temps, and actually most herbs originated from Mediterranean area and can take a lot of heat. For gray leaved ornamentals, consider Artemesia, there are so many varieties, Russian sage, a bee lover, many sedums, and be sure to include: Autumn Joy; it is joyful all through the season. All Yarrows are very drought tolerant. For some ideas that will work for nice color but do not have gray leaves there are Gaillardias, with so many shades of reds, oranges, and yellows and they keep blooming for you. Don't forget Valerian, Cerastium, Penstemons and



Valerian

Hyssops. For some ground cover Portulaca not only can stand high heat but are happy with poor, dry soil. Be sure to include ornamental grasses that are tough, and many have those gray leaves to add more color to your yard.



Cerastium

About those containers and hanging baskets. Some of our members who love their hanging baskets have taken them to the North side of their houses during our heat spells and get them back where they were originally later. Be mindful of keeping them watered properly. You may have to water more than once a day. The same might apply to your pots and containers. The bigger the better is a good message when planting in pots and if they are big having them on a wheeled platform for easy moving during hot temperatures can be so helpful.

One of the biggest ideas that really works is to add more native plants to your landscape. This means native to our area, so they are successful. There are many to choose from and to help guide you it could be helpful to contact Kelsi at Heritage Garden kelsi-potterf@conserveva.net.

Do some research by enjoying the local library and of course searching the internet for more tips to help in your garden, also contact our Master Gardener clinic at 574-1604. Those good volunteers are there to help you.

And lastly, let's make a vow to install more trees into our landscape. We need that shade under them to take a break from those summer garden chores.