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Rethink Your Gardening Space
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Some of my drought-worried friends who used to enjoy gardening have reduced their plant spaces to minimal square feet, and still cannot summon up hope for their gardens this coming year. One is in her third year of letting her beds lie fallow and instead, “gardening” a large oak-leaf hydrangea. Another has shrunk her acreage to several large containers, on the deck to minimalize water needs and deer damage. Most, regardless of income, have pledged to divide and propagate to fill out their gardens and to enjoy what already thrives rather than fund large expanses of new annuals or struggling lawn. The mission of living more comfortably with the drought is an admirable one; the sometime despair of “making do” instead of planning new life in a spring garden is sad. So, why not think in terms of using less space in different ways to produce an abundant garden?

Think in terms of bigger vegetation, like the shade-loving Bear’s Breech ([Acanthus](#)) -- space-filling, showy leaves with stalks of hooded white, rose or purple flowers in spring or summer. My personal favorite is to showcase a Japanese maple beautifully in a ceramic pot which can be moved into filtered shade with the summer season. It is less work, and if you choose the right plant, less water too.

If you prefer an edible garden, how about planting bare-root artichokes or rhubarb? Expand your experience by interplanting vegetables with ornamentals in one group, such as flowering kales which boast beautifully pale inner leaves and dark outer leaves, which are also edible? Interplanting means more efficient watering in a smaller space and results in a more interesting landscape.

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Rather than straight pathways, consider water-permeable (decomposed granite or mulch-and-stepping stone), “wavy” edges with spilling ground covers, perennials, short shrubs, tall shrubs, and trees, each providing ground shade and wildlife habitat/shelter at rising levels of vision. Go for more garden impact and denser look within a smaller space. Try strawberries nestled into thyme, lavenders in the second “tier,” ceanothus, and then a crepe myrtle sheltering all. The ground covers keep the larger plants’ root space cool, aerated, and moist. This method of grouping also almost totally eliminates weeding. The trick is to densely group plants that require the same sun or shade exposure, the same watering schedule, and same requirements for acidic soil or alkaline soil. If you want to pair a *Daphne odora* (alkaline soil) with an azalea (acid soil), place one in a container and one in the ground to facilitate differing fertilizer requirements within the same garden space.

I’m newly addicted to Pinterest gardening ideas, particularly pallet-container gardening. Check it out—pallets are placed on their end and the spaces filled with potting mix. Herbs and succulents (those plants that can tolerate drying out between waterings) can be easily seduced into cascading happily down vertically. One caveat: ensure that a “cute” Pinterest project is viable and doesn’t require purchase of materials never to be used again or unsuitable plant choices given your environment or energy.

Did you realize that you have a library of gardening articles at your fingertips? Consult the archives at the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website (<http://ucanr.edu/edmg>), where you will find many articles like *Grow Up* (Paula Bertram and Kate Halvorson), *Straw Bale Gardening* (Barbara Finley), and *Square Foot Gardening* (Barbara Finley).

There is no Master Gardener class this Saturday, enjoy your Memorial Day weekend. The Sherwood Demonstration Garden is free and open to the public on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Check out beautiful plants from shade to rock gardens, veggies, roses and more. Behind Folsom Lake College – El Dorado Center, 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville.

UCCE Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions at local Farmer’s Markets, and Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.