



Putting the Right Plant in the Right Place

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One of the Master Gardeners' guiding principles is putting the right plant in the right place. This means ensuring that the plant you buy will fit the environment you put it in, so that it has the greatest chance of success. To be able to do that, it's important to know the cultural demands of the plant and your local climate, so that you don't find yourself going to extreme measures to keep a plant alive in an unsuitable environment.

Information on the cultural needs of the plant can be obtained in several ways. The simplest is to read the label on the plant when you purchase it. Good labels should describe a plant's mature size, its water requirements, whether it requires sun or shade and its cold hardiness.

You can also research your options by consulting a reference book, such as the Sunset "Western Garden Book," or the American Horticultural Society's Encyclopedia. Most libraries have copies of these books, and often nurseries have a Sunset book on hand.

To aid you in your decision making it is helpful to know what climate zone you are in. Three different climate zone systems have been developed in the United States to help gardeners make planting choices. Keep in mind that each system uses different data sources and covers different time periods.

Sunset's Climate Zone Map applies only to the western United States and is based on a number of different elements, including cold, heat, humidity, winds, snow cover and growing season. The "Western Garden Book" contains information and maps on its climate zones. You can also use Sunset's "Plant Finder" tool (<http://plantfinder.sunset.com/plant-home.jsp>) to help determine what zone you are in; the Plant Finder can generate a list of plants that should do well in your area.

Next, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Cold Hardiness Zones break down the United States and Canada into twelve zones by the coldest average temperature; note that only temperature is taken into consideration. The USDA's on-line zip code finder can be used determine your Cold Hardiness Zone:

<http://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/phzmweb/interactivemap.aspx>.

Both Sunset and the USDA recently updated their maps. Sunset took into account changes in western temperature distribution, while USDA added a zone and increased the number of years of weather records used for its zone distribution map.

The third zone system is the American Horticultural Society's (AHS) Heat Zone Map. Zones are defined by the average number of days each year that experience over 86 degrees Fahrenheit; 86 degrees is the temperature at which plants suffer cell damage. The AHS has not made its Heat Zone designations widely available to the general public, but you can purchase a map from its website: www.ahs.org.

Whatever zone these tools define as your area, don't forget to consider your yard's unique microclimate by looking for the presence or absence of various features, such as slopes, the direction slopes face, and pockets of colder or warmer air.

Using knowledge of your microclimate and doing your climate zone research can allow you to understand the boundaries dictated by where you live. Maybe you can grow that Meyer lemon tree you always wanted or those exotic Japanese maples you adore, and still have the right plant in the right place.

Join Master Gardener Zack Dowell this Saturday, August 3rd, for the public education class on Fall and Winter Vegetables. Who wouldn't want to continue harvesting home-grown vegetables after summertime crops disappear? Now is the time to plant for fall and winter harvests. The free, three-hour class starts at 9:00 a.m. in the Veterans Memorial Building, 130 Placerville Drive, Placerville, CA.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). 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 Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.