

botanika gardens

www.botanikagardens.com

melinda@rose@yahoo.com

Melinda Rose ~ P.O. Box 170046 San Francisco, CA 94117 ~ 415 613 0957

~~~~~

August 7, 2010

No Fuss Gardening

“In nature, fertility comes from the vegetation and soil life, not from a bag of fertilizer”  
-Toby Hemenway

There's a lot of talk these days about easing up on the chemicals in our gardens. And I think we are all familiar with the environmental impact of using chemicals in the garden.

But what I want to focus on today is how organic practices, such as; reducing use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, watering slow and deep, building healthy soil, and proper plant selection, will actually make caring for your plants and garden easier.

### Curing the Chemical Addiction

All commercial fertilizers have salts. The salts are what help deliver the concentrated food to the root zone of the plants. Salts make plants thirsty, drying out or burning off the fragile root hairs seeking out the water and nutrients. Over time your plants will lose the ability to seek out the subtler and naturally occurring water and nutrients.

Most pesticides and fungicides are non selective. Meaning they kill out the *beneficial and* harmful bugs and fungus. And the bad guys tend to be stronger and come back more quickly. With natural checks and balances thrown out of whack, the plants become dependant upon on chemical cures.

All this spraying and fertilizing leads to weak, thirsty plants unable to fend for themselves- creating a lot more work for the gardener.

### Healthy Soil for Healthy Plants

Nature abhors a vacuum. Naked earth and mono plantings (such as lawn) are weed habitats. Most weeds are “pioneer plants” specifically evolved to fill in bare and disturbed areas quickly so the life cycle can start anew. As long as we keep creating disturbed and open spaces nature will keep trying to fill them.

So one great way to prevent weeds is to fill in your garden with multiple layers to crowd out the undesirables. A lush under story shades the roots of larger trees and shrubs resulting in more drought tolerant plants. A diverse array of plant types and heights planted together will hold water and nutrients in the soil. In fact healthy soil is dependant upon the communities of beneficial microbes interacting with plant roots.

Whether you're waiting for your garden to fill in or investing in the health of an established space you can't go wrong with mulch. Basically anything you put down on top of the soil to retain moisture and suppress weeds is mulch. In most cases I recommend organic matter such as compost, shredded redwood and patio barks. They will break down slowly over time and become part of the soil. Shredded redwood is especially useful for hillsides as it bonds together to form a mat that will stay in place. Rocks also make great mulch. They retain heat, which is very helpful in foggy areas or if working with heat loving plants such as succulents. Easiest of all, let the plants create their own mulch. Plants with deep root systems pull nutrients up from deep within the earth. The fallen leaves provide nutrients and a layer of mulch to insulate against drought and extreme temperatures.

## Plant Suggestions

Most local garden centers now have separate sections for natives and low maintenance plants. For dry, sunny locations California natives such as Ceanothus, Manzanita, Salvias, and Buckwheats (*Eriogonum*) are great staples for most gardens. Herbs are wonderful to landscape with. They are easy to establish, fast growing and a culinary treat. Plant Rosemary or Lavender for a quick hedge. Oregano and Mint create a quick groundcover. Leucodendrons, Banksias and Grevillias are beautiful no care plants from Australia and South Africa. They need excellent drainage and resent fertilizer, especially phosphorus.

botanika gardens

www.botanikagardens.com

melinda@rose@yahoo.com

Melinda Rose ~ P.O. Box 170046 San Francisco, CA 94117 ~ 415 613 0957

~~~~~

Resources and Recommended Reading

Capon, Brian Botany for Gardeners Timber Press, 2000. Mini textbook with lots of photos and illustrations. Teaches the basics of plant physiology and biology. How do the roots know where to grow, how does photosynthesis work, things of that nature.

Hemenway, Toby Gaia's Garden A Guide to Home Scale Permaculture Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 2000. This is my favorite book right now. Discusses plant communities and ecology in a very conversational tone. Plant lists, design ideas and story telling help you implement the overall concept of working *with* nature to create beautiful self-sufficient spaces.

East Bay Municipal Utility District, Plants and Landscapes For Summer Dry Climates of the San Francisco Bay Region. Like a Sunset Western Garden book, just for our area, and stock full of inspiring and gorgeous photographs.

Lanza, Patricia Lasagna Gardening for Small Spaces Rodale, 2002. A fun intro to how sheet mulching can help you create robust healthy soil. Includes lots of ideas and designs for gardens old and new.

Lecture Notes, September 17, 2009. Ted Kipping Lecture on The Soil Food Web

Pierce, Pam Golden Gate Gardening, The essential guide to growing edibles in the bay area. She has micro-climates of micro-climates, complete with detailed info on which varieties to plant, planting times and tips, caring for and even eating your harvest.

Books for Children.

Brown, Peter The Curious Garden, A young boy living in a city with no greenery discovers a tiny patch of green on an old railroad track. He learns how to be a gardener while the garden explores the town.

Heller, Ruth The Reason For a Flower Colorful illustrations and rhyming text explain why flowers exist, displaying a wide variety of plants.