

Right Plant, Right Place by Carolyn Meiers

During a recent *Green Thumb* workshop on this theme, myself and a partner Master Gardener, talked about plant placement in the garden. Obvious considerations are the awareness of "shade" plants and "sun" plants and knowing where in the garden to put them. Nursery plant tags are a good guide, as well as a general plan for the garden. Garden books and a diagram of the property are the beginning tools along with the gardener's dream and plant preferences. Take your diagram and a list to the garden center in order to avoid the "kid in the candy store" approach to buying plants.

In that plan, adequate water and erosion considerations are very important. Always be thinking about how much water will be needed/consumed. Drought tolerant plants are a good way to help our thirsty earth. Drip systems are most appropriate when possible to conserve water.

Microclimates also play a major role in that temperature, wind and exposure will dramatically affect planting success. Knowing the flow of air currents and temperature is a key factor for plants in the "right place".

The very best considerations include soil type and modifications to improve the soil for planting. Know your soil and what your plants need to thrive. Enrich the soil with compost, organic fertilizer if needed, and mulch for happy plants. Here in the Tahoe basin native plants usually do best.

In the mountains we need to seriously be aware of fire danger. Proper planting is important for defensible space around structures. According to the publication "*Common Ground*", we need to create a 0 to 5 foot zone of non-combustibles around structures. Use inorganic mulch (gravel or rocks) or low growing plants that are non-woody like clover, succulents, or native grass. Keep the area free of pine needles and wood chips.

Beyond the 5 foot zone is a 5 to 30 foot zone that needs to be "clean and green" with no dead vegetation and planted with healthy fire resistant plants. Using a combination of patchwork patterns (mosaic) in the landscape will help achieve the desired treatment.

Then the final 30 to 100 feet away from your structures should have all dead vegetation removed and thinning of any dense stands of shrubs and trees.

Trees and shrubs are an important part of our landscape design and they do need some special considerations. Although all vegetation can burn, we recognize some plants and trees to be a true hazard. Juniper bushes are definitely undesirable, along with mugo pine, and Austrian pine. These plants should be placed in the "lean, green" distance from structures or avoided.

Also think about your neighbors. Tree roots can cause expensive damage to structures, underground utilities and hardscape. Aspen trees are notorious for sending roots where they are not wanted. Think twice! Trees with defects in trunks, roots or branches can fail creating the potential for property damage or personal injury.

Tree maintenance will lengthen a tree's life by proper planting, watering, feeding and pruning. This will lengthen the tree's life and beauty, as well as the safety. Another consideration is allergy and toxicity. Some plants produce substances or allergic materials that can harm humans or animals that come into contact with them.

So when we think about "right plant - right place" there are many considerations. All of them are important and need to be part of the overall garden plan. May we all plan wisely!

Resources for more information:

Home Landscaping Guide for Lake Tahoe and Vicinity, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension.

Living with Fire: A Guide for the Homeowner: Lake Tahoe Basin

www.livingwithfire.info/tahoe

SelecTree: A Tree Selection Guide

<http://selecttree.calpoly.edu>

Common Ground pamphlet