

TRCD takes the mystery out of gardening in Tahoe

By Courtney Walker

Gardening can be difficult in Tahoe. We have a short growing season, a lot of snow and a lack of water during the summer months. But creating a beautiful garden in Tahoe is possible, and it can help conserve our precious resources.

Many Lake Tahoe residents and second homeowners are confused by all of the environmental restrictions placed on property owners. How can you possibly complete your BMPs, do your defensible space and save money on your water bill, all while having a beautiful garden? You can do all of this and more by using conservation landscaping techniques. Conservation landscaping preserves and protects our natural resources using sustainable gardening and landscaping techniques. It promotes wildlife habitat, erosion control, water conservation, healthy soil, clean air and water – including Lake Tahoe.



Conservation garden tour on Aug. 19 to provide tips for Tahoe residents.

Photo/Provided

Choosing conservation landscaping practices will enhance the look and functionality of your property while not taxing our

environment. Landscapes that integrate these practices are also typically more cost efficient and require less maintenance and fertilizers.

1. Go native: Native species thrive in Tahoe's climate. They prefer drier conditions in the summer and being buried in snow during the winter. By using native and Tahoe adapted plants, your landscape will use much less water than other vegetation like turf.

2. Do the drip: Micro-irrigation is water efficient because it delivers water directly to plants' root zone, minimizing water loss due to runoff, wind, overspray and evaporation.

3. Save your soil: By installing your best management practices (BMPs), you protect your soil from water and wind erosion and keep it out of Lake Tahoe. Up to a ton of soil can be lost in one year on an average Tahoe property without BMPs installed

4. Create space: Creating defensible space around your property will make it more fire resistant. This can be achieved through proper plant selection and creating a mosaic landscape of vegetation, rock and mulch, which breaks up a fire's ability to move across the landscape.

5. Invite in the wild: Use a variety of native plants and features to attract our local hummingbirds, butterflies and bees.

6. Grow your dinner: Even though not all fruits and vegetables can handle our short growing season, there are plenty of edibles that can – including herbs and cool season vegetables.

The Tahoe RCD provides many grant-funded resources to assist you with your conservation garden through conservation landscaping services available to California Lake Tahoe Basin homeowners. Our staff provides one-one-one, site specific advice to help homeowners meet their individual goals. While

landscape design is not included with this service, homeowners will be able to learn about project planning and site analysis, soil preparation, irrigation considerations and proper plant selection and care. For additional resources or to request an on-site visit, please visit our website or call (530) 543.1501, ext. 113.

Want to see some examples in person? Join us for the 5th annual Conservation Landscape Tour on Aug. 19 from 1–5pm. Come enjoy and explore nine beautiful gardens in Tahoma area that highlight Tahoe conservation techniques, from lakefront gardens to beautiful, fire-safe landscapes. The tour highlights native and adapted plant selection, water conservation techniques, defensible space methods, BMP demonstrations, edible gardening and wildlife enhancement features.

As you explore the gardens, feel free to ask garden stewards and homeowners questions related to the conservation landscapes and plant identification.

Last year's event brought together more than 150 Tahoe residents to enjoy a delightful summer afternoon learning about conservation practices and touring beautiful gardens.

There is no fee for this year's tour, but donations are graciously accepted. Pick up your tour map between 1–3pm from Marie Sluchack Community Park on the corner of Pine and Wilson in Tahoma. The gardens are nearby and we encourage carpooling and walking. Please leave your pets at home.

For more information, contact me at (530) 543.1501, ext. 118 or go online.

Courtney Walker is the conservation planner for Tahoe Resource Conservation District.