

## Choose Plants for Your Landscape Wisely

By John Cobourn, Water Resource Specialist, and  
Heather Segale, Environmental Education Coordinator  
University of Nevada Cooperative Extension

Date: July 15, 2003

Whether you are putting in a new landscape or refurbishing an existing one, you should first look closely at the plants that are established there. What do you have to work with? If there are areas on the property with natural vegetation and habitat, consider leaving them alone. If such areas contain native plants, they can be beautiful wildlife viewing areas that are very easy to maintain and good for the environment. Such areas should be fenced off to exclude entry during construction activities. This not only protects the plants, but also the extremely valuable native soils, which are rich in organic matter and ideal for growing plants.

If the natural vegetation on your property has been disturbed or removed, what has taken its place? If the current landscape requires lots of maintenance (mowing, watering, fertilizing or controlling pests), you might consider removing sections of it and planting native and adapted plants. If some areas are unvegetated, look for signs of erosion. Bare soil should be covered with a combination of perennial plants, shrubs or trees and covered with a long-lasting mulch such as wood or bark chips or a 1-inch to 2-inch layer of decomposing pine needles. At Lake Tahoe, most vegetation in your landscape should consist of native or adapted plants.

### Plan Before You Buy

When you design or renovate a landscape, you should have a carefully worked out plan before

you select plants. You should identify special features such as stream environment zones (SEZs), which can't have turf or other new landscaping, and patches of native vegetation that you'll leave in their natural state. Exercise care and foresight when selecting plants for specific locations. Reduce the wildfire threat by creating defensible space near any structures, and control erosion by providing plant cover that protects and holds soil in place. Consider plants' specific moisture and light requirements when purchasing them and placing them in your landscape.

### Use the TRPA Recommended Plant List

There is a complete list and color photographs of TRPA's recommended species of plants for Lake Tahoe landscapes in Chapter 7 of the *Home Landscaping Guide for Lake Tahoe and Vicinity*. These are plants proven to grow successfully in the Tahoe Basin. Many are natives, and the rest are introduced species that are well-adapted to the soil and climate. Native plants are plants that were here prior to the arrival of European-American settlers. Adapted introduced plants originated elsewhere, but are well-suited to conditions in the Lake Tahoe Basin. Local horticulturists and botanists have recommended the adapted introduced plants because they're available commercially and contribute to an important goal – preventing erosion that can cause polluted runoff to enter the lake. When using native plants, the plant stock should originate as close as possible to the Tahoe Basin. In most cases, you should add organic matter such as compost to the soil before planting.

(Continued on page 2)



Lake Tahoe Environmental Education Coalition

tahoe.com

UCDAVIS



COOPERATIVE  
EXTENSION  
Bringing the University to You



Watch for "The Lake Tahoe Report" each week and tune in to KOLO-TV News Channel 8 Tuesdays at 5 p.m. "The Lake Tahoe Report" is a collaborative effort of the Lake Tahoe Environmental Education Coalition, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, UC Davis and the USDA Forest Service. For more information, contact Heather Segale, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, (775) 832-4138, or logon to [www.lteec.org](http://www.lteec.org).

# The Lake Tahoe Report

(Continued from page 1)

Native and adapted plants are also called “resource-efficient plants.” Most require little fertilizer, further helping to protect the lake’s water quality. Many are drought-tolerant and, once established, need little supplemental irrigation. Their use also reduces the likelihood of problems when a homeowner isn’t often present to care for them.

## **Group Plants Into Moisture Zones**

Matching plant moisture needs with the site reduces plant stress, disease, insect problems and maintenance requirements. The plant list in the Home Landscaping Guide gives moisture requirements to assist you in selecting plants for specific sites on your property (see column labeled “Moisture Zones”). Plants labeled “wet” will require water every two to four days during the growing season. Plants labeled “medium” should do well on gently sloping or flat areas with deep soils that are not excessively wet or dry. Plants marked “dry” will survive on steeper or rockier slopes that face south or west, once established.

Group together plants with similar moisture requirements. Specific valves of your irrigation system should serve each moisture zone or “hydrozone.” For example, the “Lean, Clean and Green Zone” (defensible space within 30 feet of structures) should have lawn, deciduous trees, perennials and/or shrubs requiring water every two to four days in summer, and once a week in spring and fall. Select “wet” or “medium” plants for this zone. In most cases, it is best to place plants labeled as “dry” further from the house. Design the irrigation system to match the planting zones in your landscape. A system that waters all areas equally wastes water and is detrimental to your plants’ health.

More information about landscape management is available in the *Home Landscaping Guide for Lake Tahoe and Vicinity*. You can receive a copy as part of a free Best Management Practices (BMP) site evaluation by calling the Tahoe Resource Conservation District, (530) 543-1501, Ext. 6, or the Nevada Tahoe Conservation District, (775) 586-7223, Ext. 1.