

# ADAPTING *to a Changing Climate*

Garden centers are finding long-term eco-friendly solutions to help adjust to climate challenges.

By Teresa McPherson

**H**otter-than-average summers have brought new challenges not only to home gardeners but to garden centers as well. Garden centers and growers are addressing the issue by adapting more eco-friendly practices and promoting drought-tolerant and native plants.

## Water Wisely

Tiger Palafox, vice president of Mission Hills Nursery in San Diego, California, says he isn't ready to do away with landscaping for the sake of saving a little water.

"I always feel water toward a landscape is important water," he says. Landscapes provide myriad benefits, including "cooling our homes, protecting us from wind and creating a space rich with inspiration and joy. To do away with these to save a small amount of water is a greater problem. So I tell my customers to focus on efficient watering and not wasting it. Don't allow runoff from excessive watering. Do not over-water your landscape. Water at night to give maximum absorption with minimal evaporation."

Water conservation practices are used at Mission Hills Nursery as well. "We hand water all our material so it allows us to water more or less based on an individual plant. We also shaded more of our nursery with a light shade cloth to prevent transpiration."

In addition, he says that in the warmer months, they decrease inventory amounts so there's less inventory to take care of.

## Drought-Tolerant is Big Business

"Being based in San Diego, drought-tolerant plants are a big portion of our business," Palafox says. "Low-water California natives, Australian natives and Mediterranean plants probably make up 30% of our inventory. Then cactus and succulents are another 20%. So, half our nursery is low-water plants."

Growers are seeing increased demand for drought-tolerant plants as well. "Consumers are interested in drought-tolerant shrubs, trees, perennials ... it's clear that consumers are more interested in longer-term solutions and choices, and that there is a new orientation to climate adaptive plants," says Katie Tamony, chief marketing officer at Monrovia.

Georgia Clay, Monrovia's new plants manager, agrees. "We are seeing a large increase in demand for cactus and succulents as water-intensive lawns are beginning to be replaced with drought-tolerant landscapes and rock gardens."



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Example Assortment:

Assortment #1*		
Grey/Black/Brown		
1 GALLON	GREY	(50 UNITS)
5 GALLON	GREY	(30 UNITS)
7 GALLON	GREY	(20 UNITS)
1 GALLON	BLACK	(50 UNITS)
5 GALLON	BLACK	(20 UNITS)
7 GALLON	BLACK	(20 UNITS)
1 GALLON	BROWN	(50 UNITS)
5 GALLON	BROWN	(20 UNITS)
7 GALLON	BROWN	(20 UNITS)
65 GALLON	BROWN	(5 UNITS)
100 GALLON	BROWN	(5 UNITS)



\* Everything except the fixture included, from poster and pouches to shelf tags!

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## Promoting Drought-Tolerant Plants

When promoting drought-tolerant plants, Tamony says it's important to remember that these include more than succulents. "A demonstration display that shows that drought-tolerant plants include more than succulents would be useful. Display drought-tolerant color, shrubs, etc., together to inspire and surprise the consumer. Also, new gardeners might not realize that even drought-tolerant plants need water to get established, and that trees may need help during drought.

She suggests that garden centers offer drought-tolerant landscaping live seminars to answer Q&A on drip irrigation, mulch or other water-wise practices.

She says a key pillar of the Monrovia brand is "to 'Grow Responsibly.'" That means we recycle 95% of our water, use mycorrhizae (a beneficial fungus) in our special soil mixes to ensure robust root development, use beneficial insects and limited chemical interventions, and create our own compost. We are constantly improving our growing practices to follow nature.

"We also grow thousands of plants for pollinators, including native milkweeds for each region. We continually add new varieties to our selections that are more disease-resistant (needing less chemical intervention) and more drought-tolerant.

"We also educate and inspire consumers with planting ideas suited to a changing climate. Our "Low-Water, High Beauty" downloadable guide is available for free [at [https://go.monrovia.com/hubfs/LowWater\\_HighBeauty\\_Guide.pdf](https://go.monrovia.com/hubfs/LowWater_HighBeauty_Guide.pdf)]." 🌱



Photo by Doreen Wynja for Monrovia



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