



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

New Year's Resolution for the Garden (January 11, 2025)

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A great goal for 2025 for many of us might be to become a more conserving gardener who is more in tune with our local environment. Not to presume that any of us has been super lavish in the past, but there is always room for improvement. New Year resolutions are never easy, and this gardening goal might not be easy, but why not try? You may have a landscape that is old and well-established. Perhaps you can't afford to pull everything out and start over, but you can make small changes that will add up to being more environmentally friendly. Here are some resolutions that might help you reach your goal.

Grow MORE Vegetables and Herbs: We all know that living in the San Joaquin Valley affords us three growing seasons, but we still mainly use our landscapes for admiring rather than growing food. Start small and just try a couple of vegetables at a time and only a few plants of each. You can learn how to grow vegetables without being overwhelmed with work. Perennial herbs are beautiful to admire and use in the kitchen, while annual herbs (like most vegetables) have specific seasons that they grow and produce with minimal care.



Grow MORE Fruit Trees: Evergreen citrus trees provide fruit in winter and spring, and deciduous fruit trees provide luscious fruit in summer. Find a spot where there is some room for fruit to drop, and you can have a backyard orchard without too much fuss. In the 1990s, the "Backyard Orchard Culture" was introduced and promoted by nurseries. Fruit trees can be grown on either standard or semi-dwarfing rootstock and maintained at a much smaller size. Two to four trees are grown in the same amount of space needed for one full-sized tree. Or buy a "cocktail" tree with several types of fruit (peach, plum, and nectarine) all on one rootstock. Bareroot season is here, so trees are available now, and you can get started right away. The big trick is to prune them in the summer after they have produced their crop. Keep them small and manageable, and the rewards will still be big.

Grow LESS Lawn: There is no better substitute for a lawn than grass, but most of us don't use our lawns for sports activities. We've been spoiled by the look of luscious green lawns surrounding New England cottages where rain and snow are plentiful, and the summer season is actually very short. Even parts of CA are like this, but not here in the SJV. We need to adapt to our low rainfall seasons and our hot, dry summers that persist for the majority of the year. If you've got kids or pets, then you'll want some lawn area. If you are replacing or installing a new lawn, choose a warm-season Bermuda or a buffalograss lawn over a cool-season tall fescue turf, and you'll instantly save 25% on water requirements for the year.

Though you may like lawns a great deal, do you end up feeling guilty when watering in the summertime? Maybe you can consider reducing the total surface of the lawn in your yard replacing a portion of it with pavers or perennial plants. Or contemplate removing the remainder of the front lawn this season and replacing it with a drought-tolerant groundcover that will still be attractive and keep the dust down but will only require one-third of the lawn's water.

Mow and Blow LESS: Besides saving on water, smaller lawns mean running the lawnmower for fewer minutes,

which conserves gas and reduces noise pollution. You may find you don't need or desire a blower if your yard is relatively small and if you can't stand the noise and the dust they stir up. It usually doesn't take any longer to sweep your driveway, patio, and walkways than it does to blow them. One can appreciate how handy they are for big jobs, but still, they are overused in many neighborhoods. Raking or sweeping is a great exercise, as well as helping retain topsoil.

Plant FEWER summer annuals and water-loving perennial plants; **Plant MORE** water-wise perennial flowers and shrubs: Planting winter annuals in the fall does not require excess watering, but planting summer annuals does. So, limit summer annuals to where they will provide the most dramatic effect with the least input of water. Use improved water-wise (drought tolerant) native and non-native perennial plants over water-loving plants. It is hard to know the difference at times, but ask at the nursery.

Compost MORE, fertilize LESS: Apply bagged compost and steer manure, or make your own compost. If your excuse has been a lack of room in the yard, perhaps this year you can at least start with coffee grounds and vegetable scraps in a designated small area. Add the practice of applying a thick layer of compost over your entire landscape a couple of times a year, and you'll notice a marked difference in plant growth.

Mulch MORE, Water LESS: Spring is the time to spread a thick layer of organic mulch around all flower and shrub beds and around trees. The thicker, the better for water conservation, cooler soil for the roots, and weed control. Just keep it from touching the bases of plants.

Water ONLY when needed: Gardeners of tomorrow have the potential to be smarter irrigators than gardeners of today, provided they're not lazy. Advances in computers, weather information, and smart irrigation technology are being combined and can be the norm in new housing tracts. Pay attention to your city's watering schedule and adjust your sprinklers accordingly.

Pour LESS concrete, incorporate MORE porous hardscapes: Rather than solid, impervious layers of concrete, the driveways of the future will combine strips of porous zones to accept rainfall and excess water rather than letting runoff flow into streets and gutters.

End GOAL: "Gardening Central Valley Style" is our term for "Sustainable Landscaping."

The Tulare-Kings Counties Master Gardeners will answer your questions in person:

Visalia Farmer's Market, 1st & 3rd Saturdays, 8 - 11 am, Tulare Co. Courthouse

Questions? Call the Master Gardeners:

Tulare County: (559) 684-3325, Tues & Thurs, 9:30-11:30.

Kings County: (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30-11:30 am.

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