

Take the Green Garden Challenge **by Vera Strader**

“Going green” has become an essential way of life. Perhaps you have turned down the thermostat, replaced old light bulbs with fluorescents, and conscientiously recycle.

Next, how green is your yard and garden? Does it contribute to a healthy, water-wise, sustainable environment? In her January 7 Union Democrat article, (which can be found at <http://cetolumne.ucdavis.edu/newsletters.htm>), Marlys Bell describes how she and her husband are striving to make their garden more green.

Now you can rate your garden by answering the following questions. Each “A” answer is worth two points, “Bs” add one point, and “Cs” are zero points.

1. Are your plants grouped by sun and water needs?
 - A. Yes
 - B. Sometimes
 - C. Rarely or never

2. What percent of your landscaped area is watered with a drip or other low-volume irrigation system?
 - A. More than 75%
 - B. 40-75%
 - C. 0-40%

3. Do you reduce frequency of watering and turn off watering systems entirely when the weather permits?
 - A. Always
 - B. Sometimes
 - C. Never

4. Do you regularly monitor your water systems to be sure they are functioning properly, without overspray or runoff?
 - A. Several times each year
 - B. Now and then
 - C. No

5. How much lawn does your landscaped area include?
 - A. Less than 15%
 - B, 15-40%
 - C. More than 40%

6. What percent of your landscaped areas are mulched with organic materials (compost, aged animal manure, leaves, ground bark, or pine needles) or stones to conserve moisture and cut down on weeds?
 - A. More than 75%
 - B. 25-75%
 - C. 0-25%

To determine the amount of compost needed to cover an area, go to <http://www.math.umn.edu/~white/personal/compost.html>

7. When you add new plants to your yard, you
 - A. Usually search out natives suitable for your growing conditions
 - B. Add natives now and then
 - C. Buy what looks prettiest in the nursery at the time

California natives are more likely to be drought and deer resistant and provide wildlife habitat.

8. When adding fertilizer to your plants, you
 - A. Usually choose organic amendments over non-organic “chemical” fertilizers
 - B. Use mostly chemical fertilizers according to label directions
 - C. Liberally apply chemical fertilizers as “preventive maintenance”

Organic fertilizers break down more slowly, improve the soil, and are less likely to pollute soils and waterways. Top-dressing with compost and using a mulching lawnmower can provide most of your garden’s nutrient needs.

9. When you see insects in your garden, you
 - A. First identify the insects to determine if they are harmful; then choose the least toxic solution
 - B. Check the shelves in the garden supply store to see what the labels say will work
 - C. Immediately spray or call the pest control company

For help with non- and minimally toxic Integrated Pest Management (IPM), visit <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/menu.homegarden.html>.

10. What percent of yard and non-recyclable kitchen wastes are either bagged for disposal or burned?
 - A. Almost all are composted or chipped for use on site
 - B. Some are composted or chipped
 - C. No composting or chipping
11. You manage invasive plants by
 - A. Consistently removing invaders and being sure new plantings are not invasive species
 - B. Removing the most obnoxious weeds
 - C. Practicing a “whatever grows will grow” philosophy

To find alternatives to popular invasive plants, go to the “Don’t Plant a Pest” website hosted by the California Invasive Plant Council at <http://www.cal-ipc.org/landscaping/dpp/index.php>

12. To provide a sustainable environment for wildlife, you
 - A. Apply the foregoing good gardening practices *and* add water for wildlife drinking and bathing
 - B. Practice most of the above points
 - C. Pay no attention to wildlife needs

BONUS QUESTIONS

1. If you have native oak trees on your property, you
 - A. Are careful to not water, compact, or disturb the soil under their drip lines
 - B. Do not water or disturb the soil within twelve feet of their trunks
 - C. Pay little attention to oak tree health
2. You make the best of our precious rainfall by
 - A. Harvesting rainwater with a catchment system and/or use grey water *and* use primarily permeable surfaces for hardscaping
 - B. Use at least one of the above techniques
 - C. Use none above techniques
3. You protect your home from wildfire by
 - A. Clearing brush and dead limbs to 100 ft. *and* planting fire resistant plants around your home
 - B. Working on the above principles but still have a ways to go
 - C. You don't consider wildfire a risk

For fire safe information, visit http://www.tuolumnefiresafe.org/fire_landscape.html.

For plant ratings for fire, drought and deer resistance and wildlife benefit go to <http://ceeldorado.ucdavis.edu/files/15680.htm>. You can also call Tuolumne County Master Gardeners at 209.533.5696 for answers to gardening questions.

HOW DID YOU DO? It's time to total up your score. Twenty to twenty-seven points indicates that you have made good progress toward a greener yard; thirteen to twenty points indicates a good start, and less than 13 means its time to think seriously about living more green. Everyone's environment depends on it.

Sonora Master Gardener Vera Strader and husband Dan continue to make their yard greener by searching out native and drought tolerant plants and fine tuning watering systems.