

Plants for Problem Places: Dry Soil

The Pacific Northwest is often referred to as 'wet' and 'rainy'. But from mid July until late September or early October, we can be very dry, with little rainfall. If you don't irrigate, your soil can become quite dry in a short time. There are measures you can take to keep your soil from drying out too much. One of the best measures is to keep your plants mulched, with a 2"-3" layer of coarse organic material such as bark mulch or woodchips. Improving your soil by adding organic amendments can also help. Grouping plants together so that plants that need more summer moisture are all together makes watering easier. But if you are still planning your garden, one of the best things you can do is choose plants that are tolerant of summer drought.

Trees

- *Arbutus menziesii* or Pacific Madrone. Beautiful, moderate sized evergreen tree, very difficult to establish, but thrives in coastal areas. Messy leaf litter.
- *Arbutus unedo* or Strawberry Tree. Small evergreen tree with ornamental strawberry-like fruits in the fall. A close relative of our native Madrone.
- *Cedrus sp.* True Cedars. Many cultivars of Deodar Cedar, Atlas Cedar, and Lebanon Cedar are available, from small dwarfs to moderated sized trees. Most prefer sun.
- *Eucalyptus sp.* Eucalyptus. Several varieties of evergreen trees, small to large growing.
- *Ficus caria* Edible Fig. Bushy, usually multistemmed tree, to 12'-15', with late summer fruit. Needs well drained soil.
- *Juglans sp.* Walnuts. These long lived, large nut trees prefer deep, well drained soils.
- *Koelreuteria paniculata* Golden Rain Tree. A moderate sized tree, to 30', with late summer flowers and fall color.
- *Pinus sp.* Pines. Most pines are drought tolerant; 2 needled pines are the most drought and soil tolerant. Many species and selected cultivars are available, from large trees to small dwarfs.
- *Quercus sp.* Oaks. Moderate to large trees, many oaks can tolerate summer drought quite well. Some are also tolerant of winter wet soils.
- *Sequoiadendron giganteum* Giant Redwood. Giant conifers well suited to winter wet and summer drought.



Shrubs

- *Arctostaphylos sp.* Manzanita & Kinnikinnik. Moderate sized evergreen shrubs and groundcovers. Prefer well-drained soils, drought tolerant when established.
- *Berberis sp.* Barberries. Deciduous and evergreen shrubs, many cultivars from small 2' shrubs to large 12' plants.
- *Caryopteris clandonensis* Blue Spiraea. Deciduous shrubs to 3'-4', blue flowers in late summer.
- *Ceanothus sp.* California wild lilac. Many cultivars available, most are evergreen with blue or white summer flowers. Needs well drained soil and full sun.
- *Cistus* Rockroses. Evergreen shrubs, many cultivars available, growing from 2'-8' depending on variety. Full sun, needs well-drained soils.

- *Cercis occidentalis* Western Redbud. Large shrub or small tree, with spring flowers before the leaves emerge. Needs well drained soils.
- *Cotoneaster sp.* Cotoneaster. Mostly evergreen, some deciduous shrubs, from low groundcovers to large 8'-10' shrubs. Need well drained soils.
- *Cotinus sp.* Smokebush. Deciduous shrubs to 10'-20', can be kept smaller with pruning, usually grown for their attractive foliage.
- *Elaeagnus sp.* Deciduous and evergreen shrubs, most are drought tolerant when established, many of the deciduous species have berries.
- *Escallonia* Escallonia are evergreen shrubs, many cultivars available, with summer flowers of pale to deep pink. Can be sheared for hedging.
- *Euonymus japonica* Wintercreeper. Evergreen shrubs in many colors, shapes and sizes.
- *Garrya elliptica* Silktassel. Evergreen shrubs to 8'-10', native to the West coast.
- *Gaultheria sp.* Salal and its relatives. Evergreen small shrubs or large groundcovers, prefer moist soil in summers and partial shade.
- *Hippophae rhamnoides* Seaberry. Vigorous deciduous shrubs with silvery leaves and edible, orange berries. Both male and female plants needed for fruit.
- *Juniperus sp.* Junipers. Available in many shapes and sizes, from low groundcovers to medium sized trees. All need well drained soils.
- *Lavendula sp.* Lavender. Shrubby herbs grown for their fragrant flowers. They need full sun and well drained soils.
- *Mahonia sp.* Oregon Grape. Both low Oregon Grape and tall Oregon Grape are tolerant of summer drought once established. Tall Oregon Grape can also tolerate wet soil.
- *Pittosporum sp.* Pittosporums or Tobira. Evergreen shrubs, most growing to 10'-12' or more, easily hedged. Check hardiness for your site.
- *Prostanthera sp.* Bush Mint. Evergreen shrubs. The most commonly found is *P. cuneata*, Alpine Bush Mint, which grows to 2'-3' and has white flowers. The larger growing *P. rotundifolia* Round Leafed Bush Mint, is pink flowered, and may be a little less hardy.
- *Rosa sp.* Species and Wild Roses. Check for disease resistance if planting hybrids; moist air can cause mildew and blackspot problems.
- *Rosmarinus officinalis* Rosemary. Shrubby evergreen herbs, needs well drained soils and full sun. Drought tolerant when established.
- *Salvia officinalis* Sage. Culinary sage, along with many of the ornamental salvias do best in lean, dry soils. Most are evergreen, and require full sun.



Perennials & Bulbs

- *Achilla sp.* Yarrow. Low ferny foliage topped by flat flowerheads in summer. Many colors available. Can be invasive in good soils.
- *Armeria sp.* Seathrift. Grassy foliage topped in late spring by ball shaped flower heads, usually pink. Drought tolerant when established.
- *Camas sp.* Camas. Mid spring bloomers, most often blue, from bulbs. Tolerant of winter wet soils, often go dormant by early summer.
- *Erigeron sp.* Fleabanes. Many species of daisy like flowers native to the West Coast, and their hybrids.
- *Euphorbia sp.* Deciduous and evergreen perennials of many sizes. Many will reseed.

- *Frittilaria sp.* Chocolate Lily. Native lily relatives with interesting checkered flowers in early spring. Summer dormant.
- *Gaillardia sp.* Blanket Flower. Daisy like perennials, usually in shades of yellow, orange and red. Best in full sun.
- *Helianthemum sp.* Sunrose. Evergreen shrublets available in many flower colors. All benefit from shearing after bloom.
- *Iris tenax* Pacific Iris. Evergreen iris native to coastal California and Oregon.
- *Kniphofia sp.* Red Hot Poker. Tough, grassy foliage, topped by spikes of yellow to orange flowers, loved by hummingbirds.
- *Lewisa sp.* Bitterroot, Lewisia. Deciduous and evergreen succulents, native to the western mountains. All require lean, well drained soils.
- *Nepeta sp.* Catmint. Gray leafed perennials for full sun. Fragrant foliage is attractive to cats; the spike of blue flowers are attractive to bees.
- *Penstemon sp.* Beardtongue or Penstemon. Mostly evergreen perennials or small shrublets, many native to the West, need sun and well drained soils. Loved by bumblebees and hummingbirds.
- *Perovskia atriplicifolia* Russian Sage. A shrubby perennial to 3'-4', best in lean well drained soil and full sun.
- *Phygelius sp.* Cape Fuchsia. Shrubby perennials with tubular flowers, many colors available, all loved by hummingbirds. They can spread aggressively, so site them carefully.
- *Sedum sp.* Stonecrop. Deciduous and evergreen succulents, many colors and sizes, more often grown for leaf texture rather than flowers.
- *Sempervirens sp.* Hens and Chicks. Succulents in many sizes and colors, very easy in well drained soils, great rock garden plants.

Grasses

- *Calamagrostis sp.* Reed Feather Grass. Tall deciduous grasses, several named varieties.
- *Cortaderia sellona* Pampas Grass. Evergreen large clumping grass, very showy flower plumes.
- *Festucas sp.* Fescues. Short evergreen clumping grasses, several in blues and grays.
- *Helictotrichon sempervirens* Blue Oat Grass. Evergreen blue grass, moderated sized, to 2'.
- *Pennisetum sp.* Fountain Grass. Deciduous clumping grasses, ornamental flowers.

Grasses and groundcover provide a foil for *Ceanothus thyrsifolia* 'Victoria' and *Cistus x 'Purpureaus'* in bloom.

