

## A Little Pumpkin History

The pumpkin is an American icon, like apple pie and the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Nothing signals the start of autumn like the arrival of pumpkins and great fall weather.

We tend to think of pumpkins as a vegetable, but it is biologically considered a fruit. Like other forms of squash, pumpkins are easy to grow. In the early 1800's, decorative pumpkins called jack-o'-lanterns were carved to celebrate the autumn harvest season (great decorative ideas can be found on Pinterest!). In 1819, Washington Irving featured a mysterious jack-o'-lantern in his short story *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, which may have led to the carved pumpkin's popular association with the Halloween holiday.

In the 1800's it became popular to serve pumpkin pies for the Thanksgiving holiday, a trend that continues to this day with over 50 million baked yearly....YUM!!!!



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## A PLANT BY ANY OTHER NAME...

Landscape designers and landscape maintenance professionals have been responding to the challenge of identifying plant materials that are suitable for survival under drought conditions and watering restrictions. As a result, there are a lot of terms being tossed around throughout the industry that can be confusing when trying to select the proper plant materials. The most popular terms are native, drought-tolerant, and California-friendly, not to be confused with xeriscape, which is entirely different.

Let's start with the term native. Native plants are those that are indigenous to a specific region. The term has been expanded to also include those species that have been introduced and, over time, evolved and adapted to a region or climate zone. Factors such as exposure, soil type, and moisture needs will determine a plant's chances for survival when planted outside of its natural habitat. California native plants are highly drought-tolerant, but characteristically go dormant (stop flowering, drop leaves, and turn brown) during the hotter, drier seasons, making them less appealing to homeowners.

Drought-tolerant is a broad term and is also referred to as drought-resistant. Plants that are drought-tolerant, as the name implies, withstand or are resistant to drought conditions. However, drought conditions are often not static. A prolonged drought state, such as what we recently experienced in Southern California, can have a significant impact on adaptive plant species. These plants often become weak and susceptible to disease. Drought-tolerant plants also use a survival mechanism like native plants (defoliating and going dormant) to survive abnormally dry conditions, so they need supplemental moisture to resume their normal appearance.

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## A Plant by Any Other Name..., Cont.

California-friendly is a term that is synonymous with water-saving, and encompasses both native and drought-tolerant plants. It is also somewhat ambiguous and can be misleading. California is a large state, consisting of a variety of climate and micro-climate zones. Most of California is identified as having a Mediterranean climate with mild winters and warm, dry summers. However, a California-friendly plant found growing in a coastal region is likely to have difficulty adapting to a hotter, drier, desert-like region, even if planted only fifty miles from its point of origin.

It is important to do your research before making your final plant selections. Although there is a lot of information that can be obtained off of the Internet, it is advisable to visit a local nursery. This gives you the opportunity to observe the plants in their natural environment. Home Improvement and Garden Centers offer plants that are not all grown locally. So, a local nursery is your best option for selecting plant materials.

It is also critical to remember that all new plants need time to adapt. They will need supplemental watering to establish a healthy root system. Fall and early spring are the best times of the year to plant; taking advantage of available moisture and cooler temperatures.

## PLANT ADAPTABILITY

Plants can adapt and survive in a variety of locations and under a range of conditions. However, plants cannot adapt entirely on their own. They need to be guided through the transition process from past watering practices to the current water-saving methods, as well as being relocated from nursery to garden. Knowing your geographic location and growing zones are vital to plant survival and the plant selection process.

The Inland Empire falls within the Csa climate zone, known as (dry) hot-summer Mediterranean, (Köppen). The region is also identified by the popular Sunset Western Garden Book as growing zone 18, known as the Southern California interior valley cold zone. Within these zones, some regions are drier than others.

Annual rainfall in our area, the majority of which often comes between December and March, averages around 10 inches. The balance of the year can be very dry and often hot, exposing plants to many extreme conditions. We also have an abundance of direct sunlight; the soils are mostly sandy or rocky; and we experience our share of strong winds, furthering the impact on plant survival and adaptability.

Climate change has outpaced the ability for plants to adapt to drought conditions and watering restrictions, making it difficult to develop a successful plant palette for the Inland Empire. As plants evolve and adapt to low water use, they begin to display some of the characteristics of native plants, such as a longer dormancy period. This can lead to the plants being unappealing and thus, less likely to be used in urban landscape settings. Supplemental watering however, may be the solution to shortening the dormancy period.

Several factors affect the length of the weaning period. They include, the time



of year that you plant (fall and spring are recommended), the health of the plant materials (the healthier the plant, the better the odds of making it through the first summer), and the size of the plant containers (the smaller the container, the better the odds of adapting and surviving). Once established, most plants will survive with little or no supplemental watering.

The Sunset Western Garden Book is a valuable resource, on many levels, for selecting plant materials. In addition to the botanical and common names, the book identifies the growing zones, exposure tolerances, watering (moisture) needs, and other important factors to assist in plant selection and plant placement.

Pay close attention to the exposure requirements and tolerances when designing your landscape plan, selecting plant materials, and also when planting. Exposure to too much sun can damage your plants, especially when newly planted. Fortunately, using a minimum three-inch layer of mulch can help to mitigate some of the exposure and moisture constraints. Mulch will shield the soil from the pounding sun, characteristic of our region, as well as promoting water-retention by reducing evaporation.

Using plant materials with the capacity to survive under these changing and challenging conditions will increase your chances for an appealing and successful landscaping experience.

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