



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

WUCOL: An Online Landscaping Tool for Home Gardeners (April 14, 2024)

by Rosie Bonar, Tulare/Kings Counties Master Gardener

It's Spring planting time, but most gardeners want to know which plants best suit Tulare and Kings Counties. Home gardeners will have more success when choosing plants for their yards if they consider the climate, amount of available water, amount of shade, and location within the state of California. Not every plant is well suited for the San Joaquin Valley.

If you are adding a plant and are already set up with a sprinkler system, you will want to choose a plant with water needs similar to that of plants already in that sprinkler zone. Arranging plants with similar water needs within one sprinkler zone or irrigation line is called hydrozoning. Hydrozoning helps conserve water by making your irrigation more efficient, and it helps plants get the amount of water they need to flourish. You would not want to give a water-loving hydrangea the same amount of water that you give a drought-tolerant salvia, for example.

Here is where you can use a great online tool that UC Davis has developed. It can help the home gardener select appropriate plants for the landscape. It can be used whether you are planning a brand new landscape or just adding or replacing plants to your existing landscape. It is called

"Water Use Classifications of Landscape Species" or WUCOLS. WUCOLS is an online database maintained by the University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources. Based on the field experience of landscape horticulturists, WUCOLS provides information on the water needs of more than 3000 plants used in horticulture in California.

WUCOLS divides California into six different regions. Tulare County is in the Central Valley region. Within each region, plants are put into categories according to their water needs: high, moderate, low, and very low. (Those terms are defined on the website.) Wucols further divides plants into growth habits such as trees, shrubs, ground cover, etc.

I will attempt to introduce you to the plant search database to explain how it can help you select plants for your home. Follow these steps.

- Go to <http://ucanr.edu/sites/WUCOLS/>
This takes you to the WUCOLS homepage.
- Find the menu on the right-hand side. It is yellow. Choose "Plant Search Database." It is the 5th item down from the top.
- That leads to the page where you select your city by region in a dropdown box. It is on the left side of the page. Visalia is in Region 2, Central Valley. But Visalia isn't listed. The cities most like Visalia in water needs are Bakersfield and Fresno. Type in Bakersfield in the space under City/Region.



Now, you can either search for a plant that you are curious about or find a list of plants that have similar water needs.

For example, If I am interested in adding a camellia to my garden, I will type camellia in the plant name area, and three plants come up. There, I see that there are three species of camellias, and the water needs are moderate. It is a shrub.

Or I could type in "water needs low," choose shrubs for the plant type, and get a list of plants that fit that description. If I planted a camellia with one of these low-water needs plants, the camellia would not get enough water and would most likely suffer drought stress and die without additional watering. But if I want a shrub that needs little water, I now have a whole list to choose from.

WUCOLS is an effective tool for developing a water-efficient irrigation plan. It takes some of the guesswork out of selecting plants for an area and matching their water needs. This is a tool that will take some of the guesswork out of plant selection and water needs.

Using this tool should make your spring plant selections easy and breezy!

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 North parking lot

Sat., April 13 - Luis Nursery Plant Clinic, Caldwell & Mariposa, Visalia - 10 am - 2 pm

April 20 - Hofman's Nursery Plant Clinic, 12491 W Lacey, Hanford - 10 am - 1 pm

April 20 - Container Gardening Presentation, Tulare Public Library, Tulare, 11 am-Noon

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

Visit our website for past articles, sign up for our e-newsletter, or email us with your questions:

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