

Boulder Gardens by Fran Benton

When ever I travel I always think of climate and microclimate in our gardens. Now climate is the thing we can't do much about. It rains, it snows, and it does it's usual wet coast/drought coast thing. Microclimate, however is something we can control. Think about it in your own garden. I am sure you have played musical chairs with a plant that can't seem to have the right spot to grow in. I have a sumac that has been dug up and moved at least 3 times. I was about to shovel prune it into the compost when my garden buddy said "Hey, let's move it over by the fence". Hmmm... I thought, this might not end well, but hey let's try. Well let me tell you it is thriving. Its all about microclimate and soil moisture. The fence area is a tiny bit more protected and has a bit more moisture.



As I write this sitting in the middle of a desert I am thinking a lot about moisture and exposure. Currently in early January it is pouring rain and howling wind. In a desert. Yes, I agree, this is just weird!

Nothing about climate seems a given anymore and I am sure we gardeners get less surprised every day! So perhaps it is time to look at our gardens and map out the wet areas, dry areas, sunny and shady areas with more attention than

usual. The other thing to consider is plant spacing. In a drier part of your garden maybe you need to space plants out a bit more so every plant gets a better crack at getting a drink. What I am learning from sitting in the desert is the use of stones and boulders to help the plants in terms of shade, spacing, and moisture. As I walk around I notice that the plants grow in the lee of the adjacent boulders. The dead branches provide shade and protection. This strikes me as a good strategy for the summer gardens as our climate warms.

Some people here do a pile of stones rather than boulders. That is smart because it would provide a place for bugs and other small garden helpers to hide, as well as being a lot less heavy to transport! Speaking of smart, I am sure a lot of garden club members think about how big a stone is before they transport it to a new site. Full disclosure here, years ago I rolled a monster boulder into a new part of the garden. It was many times to big to lift but I wanted it in a different location and I am very very stubborn. Rather than asking for help I rolled and pulled it to its new location. Something (that was not part of the garden or boulder) went SNAP! I had torn a ligament in my shoulder. Much physiotherapy a whole whole world of pain later I decided that future boulders would need mechanical assistance or I would be forced to ask for help. I hate asking for help. Future boulders were yanked into place with the help of my truck and a come-along. Later yet I decided to accept the inevitable and accept the boulders where they were and plant around them. And yes, I know you can hire someone to do it but where is the fun (Pain) in that? One other thing I noticed about boulders here is that underneath it is damp. Hmm, new strategy, more piles of rock are going around the plants in the garden! New philosophy- less garden work, more garden smart! We'll see how that goes! Happy garden planning!