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Less water, but still beautiful



PAT SUTPHIN, TIMES-NEWS FILE
LaMar Orton talks about the Desert Marigold on June 12, 2018, at the Orton Botanical Garden in Twin Falls. "Our whole emphasis here is to demonstrate drought tolerant plants," Orton said.

Experts say using native and drought-tolerant plants in the garden can have a big impact

As water becomes more scarce in Idaho, it could be tempting to think it will be harder to grow things here, especially things like decorative gardens. But plant experts say that doesn't have to be the case. There are great drought-resistant plants that grow well here. And incorporating them into your yard may be easier and more beneficial than you think. It doesn't take completely replacing your landscaping with rocks to make an impact on the water supply. Learn how you can use native and drought-tolerant plants in your yard and see how simple it can be to save water and still have a beautiful oasis in the desert.

See the Big Story, page D1.

THE BIG STORY

SUNDAY, JULY 11, 2021 | magicvalley.com | SECTION D



Andy West, a University of Idaho extension educator, talks about different species of buckwheat Monday, June 28, 2021, around County West in Twin Falls.

DREW NASH, TIMES-NEWS

WATER:

Every precious drop counts in the garden



JONATHAN INGRAMAM, TIMES-NEWS

Chalino Lua releases a butterfly from its box during the 9th annual Butterfly Release sponsored by Hospice Visions, Saturday, June 26, 2021, at Orton Botanical Garden in Twin Falls. Lua whispered a wish to the butterfly before release it in the hope that the wish will be granted.



The desert willow tree, has slender willow-like leaves and is dotted with purple blossoms on June 28, 2021 at the Orton Botanical Garden in Twin Falls. The tree is not really a willow but a member of the Catalpa family.

LAURIE WELCH, TIMES-NEWS

Conserving water in the garden

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TWIN FALLS

Living on the northerly fringe of the Great Basin Desert — Magic Valley residents are just starting to explore the art of creating garden spaces that conserve their precious water.

As the Magic Valley continues to mature and water becomes increasingly in short supply, more residents will likely consider conservation gardening — to protect that natural resource.

“When you talk about this type of gardening most people think of gravel or sagebrush,” Andy West said, who is the Idaho Master Gardener state coordinator and works for the University of Idaho Twin Falls County Extension Office.

When in fact there are many species and varieties of drought-tolerant trees, shrubs and plants that come from all across the country and even other countries that will grow in the region’s high desert climate and soils — and there is an impressive subset that falls into the category of being native to the state.

The definition of a native plant in the strictest sense would be indigenous to the person’s property before it was developed, but other wider definitions include being indigenous to a local eco-system, region or state.

LaMar Orton owns Orton Botanical Garden in Twin Falls with his wife, Rosalie Orton.

The garden is a non-profit, five-acre demonstration conservation garden, which is open to the public for tours.

The demo garden has more than 400 species and varieties of thriving drought-tolerant trees, shrubs and plants.

Orton has developed a list of 130 drought tolerant plants including evergreen trees and bushes, deciduous trees and bushes, perennial flowers, groundcovers and succulents.

They began developing the garden, tucked away on Falls Avenue North in 2002.

LaMar Orton said many of the people touring the garden are from the Magic Valley and are interested in conservation gardens, but a good percentage of them come from across the state or from outside the state.

“The percentage of people actually doing this type of gardening in the Magic Valley is pretty small,” Orton said. “But, I see that changing as time goes on.”

Adapting to the high desert
On average, south-central Idaho receives annual precipitation of only 10 inches.

This year 80 percent of the state is experiencing drought conditions, the Idaho Department of Water Resources told the Times-News in June.

And at some irrigation districts across the state, water managers are talking about cutting irrigation flows off early.

The availability of water, West said, will only worsen as time goes on.

West said in Twin Falls the average water usage in the summer months increases about three times over the usage during the rest of the year.

“We live in a desert, the high desert plain,” he said. “People like to think that water’s always been there in the past and it will always be there, but we are pulling out more and more of it and there is less available.”

West said a US Environmental Protection Agency report on water usage calculates that 50 percent of all outdoor water use is wasted through overwatering, runoff or evaporation.

“There is absolutely a need for conservation here. The Magic Valley depends on water and it is a precious commodity,” West said.

Drought resistant and native plants, which often go hand in hand, will need more water to get established, he said, but once they take root the water requirements go down and often they need only stewardship.

The more people who begin looking at the availability of the future water supply, and adapting to it, he said, the better.

And as interest for water conservation gardening grows in the Magic Valley — the supply of those types of plants on the market will follow, he said.

Please see GARDEN, Page D2



LAURIE WELCH, TIMES-NEWS

LaMar Orton, owner of Orton Botanical Garden in Twin Falls, shows a giant Yucca blossom that has tipped over from its weight on June 28, 2021. The 5-acre demonstration water conservation garden is open for public tours and contains more than 400 species and varieties of drought-tolerant plants.



LAURIE WELCH, TIMES-NEWS

A Fern Bush at the Orton Botanical Garden in Twin Falls is not really related to the fern but rather is a member of the rose family.



DREW NASH, TIMES-NEWS

Andy West, a University of Idaho extension educator, talks about drought tolerant plants Monday, June 28, 2021, around County West in Twin Falls.

“There is absolutely a need for conservation here. The Magic Valley depends on water and it is a precious commodity.”

Andy West, a University of Idaho extension educator

Garden

From D1

**A field of green:
At what cost?**

Average bluegrass turf takes four times as much water as anything else planted, West said. And the long term costs of mowing and fertilizing turf areas should also be considered. Orton said their water conservation garden is watered a maximum of six times a year for an hour using overhead sprinklers. If everyone planted only one-fourth of their front yard with drought-resistant plants, West said, it would help.

Or they could develop their front yard landscape using drought-resistant species and have lawn for their children to play on in the backyard.

Homeowners wouldn't have to convert their entire yards to make an impact, he said.

Designing a garden

When designing a water conservation garden space the first step is developing a plan.

Consider where turf will be planted, the land contour and climate and soil type along with how the landscape will be watered.

West said people should group drought-tolerant species with other plants having similar water requirements.

Much of the soil in the Magic Valley has a high clay content and may need additions of materials to increase drainage. Many succulents and native plants will not grow in clay-based soil.

“You don't want the water sitting around the roots or the roots will rot,” West said.

At Orton's garden, they brought in 4,000 cubic yards of gravelly soil and constructed berms for additional drainage, which shed the excess water after heavy rains or during snowmelt.

Please see GARDEN, Page D4



JONATHAN INGRAHAM, TIMES-NEWS

A Banana Yucca lines part of a pathway in the Orton Botanical Garden, as seen Saturday, June 26, 2021, in Twin Falls. On this day participants came to the garden to release butterflies at the 9th annual Butterfly Release, whispering wishes to the butterflies before release in the hope their wish would be granted.

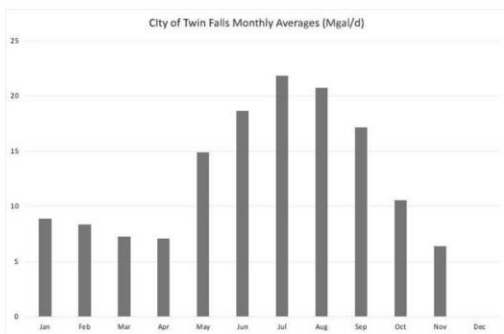


CHART COURTESY OF ANDY WEST, UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO TWIN FALLS EXTENSION OFFICE

This chart shows the average water usage measured in millions of gallons per day in the city of Twin Falls over a year. During the summer months water use increases about three times.



LAURIE WELCH, TIMES-NEWS

A red blossom variety of the Yucca plant is a favorite of hummingbirds in the garden.



JONATHAN INGRAHAM, TIMES-NEWS

Chailino Lua, left, holds a box containing a butterfly while older brother Dre Lua looks inside during the 9th annual Butterfly Release, sponsored by Hospice Visions, Saturday, June 26, 2021 at Orton Botanical Garden in Twin Falls. Participants whisper wishes to the butterfly then release the butterfly into the world in hopes the wish is granted.

The importance of pollinators

LAURIE WELCH
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TWIN FALLS — Including plants and habitats that support pollinators in a garden is prudent — because without them the world would have far less food and other natural resources.

“Without our pollinators, we’d have a real food problem,” Lamar Orten, owner of Orton Botanical Garden, said.

According to the Pollinator Partnership, which is a non-profit organization devoted to promoting the health of pollinators through conservation education and research, pollinators are critical to food production and the ecosystem.

Pollinators include beetles, butterflies, bees, bats, birds and other small animals that travel from plant to plant carrying pollen on their bodies that transfer genetic material critical to the reproductive system of most flowering plants.

Between 75 and 95 percent of flowering plants on the planet need help with pollination, according to the group’s website.

Pollinator populations are changing and many are in decline due to loss of feeding and nesting habitats, misuse of chemicals, pollution, disease and the changing climate, it said.

Jason Thomas, extension educator for the University of Idaho Extension Office, who is also known as “The Insect Hunter” on his YouTube channel, said the studies that he’s read indicate the numbers of pollinators are going down.

People can do their part by building an insect hotel in their yards made out of twigs, branches and

other natural materials for pollinators to nest in during the winter. “It will invite them into your yard,” Thomas said.

Gardeners can also plant a wide variety of plants in their garden that bloom during different times, he said.

People should also realize that some insects, like wasps, may be annoying but they are good caterpillar hunters and are beneficial.

Thomas said when farmers plant 500 acres of only corn, they attract only the insects that like to eat corn — and no insects that may prey on those corn eaters.

In a forest, Thomas said, there is diversity and diversity means balance.

Farmers can help by adding native plants that attract pollinators to portions of their fields or include them at pivot corners.

“If you build it, they will come and help you get bigger and better crops too,” the Pollinator Partnership said.



JONATHAN INGRAHAM, TIMES-NEWS

Chaplain Dick Goetsch gives an invocation inside the gazebo at the 9th annual Butterfly Release, sponsored by Hospice Visions, Saturday, June 26, 2021 at the Orton Botanical Garden in Twin Falls. After the invocation, participants released butterflies in the garden after whispering a wish to a butterfly to carry into the world and grant that person their wish.



Thomas

Jason Thomas, extension educator for the University of Idaho Extension Office, who is also known as “The Insect Hunter” on his YouTube channel, said the studies that he’s read indicate the numbers of pollinators are going down.

People can do their part by building an insect hotel in their yards made out of twigs, branches and



JONATHAN INGRAHAM, TIMES-NEWS

A man prepares boxes of butterflies to be released at the 9th annual Butterfly Release, sponsored by Hospice Visions, Saturday, June 26, 2021 at Orton Botanical Garden in Twin Falls. Participants at the release whisper wishes to the butterflies before release, carrying the wishes into the world to be granted.



JONATHAN INGRAHAM, TIMES-NEWS

Christina Lua releases a butterfly from its box during the 9th annual Butterfly Release, Saturday, June 26, 2021, at Orton Botanical Garden in Twin Falls. Lua whispered a wish to the butterfly before release in the hope that the wish will be granted.



DREW NASH, TIMES-NEWS

Pollinators go about their business Monday, June 28, 2021, planted around County West in Twin Falls.



DREW NASH, TIMES-NEWS

Pollinators go about their business near buckwheat Monday, June 28, 2021, planted around County West in Twin Falls.

Where to find drought resistant and native plants

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TWIN FALLS — Drought resistant and native plants are becoming easier to find in the Magic Valley.

These types of plants are seen more frequently at nurseries and there are some companies like Native Roots, based in Twin Falls, which are growing and marketing them.

Seed mixes are also available. Orton Botanical Garden holds a plant sale each year on the last two weekends in May where gardeners can obtain plants from the species and varieties found in their garden.

"When we began this we never intended to sell plants," LaMar Orton, owner said. "But we had people keep asking where they could get some of the plants from

our garden."

People can also venture onto public lands to collect cuttings or seeds, but some experts advise against it.

"People really need to know what's native," Heather Tiel-Nelson, spokesperson with the Bureau of Land Management said. "You don't want to grab a noxious weed and take it home." Gardeners should consider purchasing native plants from a local nursery like Native Roots, based in Twin Falls, because it is a more sustainable and a more successful route to follow for planting and has a higher success rate, Samantha Seabrook-Sturgis, BLM botanist, said.

But the BLM allows people to collect small amounts of plants, plant parts, seeds, flowers and berries for personal use in most areas. Cacti, yuccas, succu-

lents and evergreen shrubs and trees are protected by the state. Species listed as threatened or endangered are protected by the federal government and may not be collected without a permit. Species listed as sensitive or candidates for threatened or endangered status should be avoided.

Julie Thomas, spokesperson for the Sawtooth National Forest said on the forest people gathering plants, seeds or cuttings need to obtain a forest product personal use permit from the district office managing the area where they will be. They need to provide the office with the species, what they will be collecting, the amount and location they will collect from. The minimum charge is \$20 and may be more depending on the quantity and types of plants they want to bring home.



LAURIE WELCH, TIMES-NEWS
Yucca seed pods dangle from a stalk on June 28, 2021 at Orton Botanic Garden in Twin Falls. The Yucca plant requires a Yucca moth to pollinate it and develop the pods and because the plant is not native to the area the Orton's Yucca have never developed seed pods prior to this year.



LAURIE WELCH, TIMES-NEWS
The Orton Botanical Garden in Twin Falls is a demonstration conservation garden with more than 400 species and varieties of drought-tolerant plants, trees and bushes suited for south-central Idaho.

Garden

From D2

How does your garden grow?

At Orton's garden, care was taken to include types of plants that flower all season long to deliver constant color and interest in the garden.

Blossoms throughout the season provide the pollinators with a stable food supply, Orton said.

The garden is chock full of trees, bushes and plants including fern bushes with leaves revealing the origin of the name, but that really belong to the rose family, majestic towering Yucca plants, including 23 varieties and 4 o'clocks with delicate blooms that open when the sun goes down — along with all types of succulents.

Many of the plants have unusual and interesting characteristics, like the chocolate flower plant with cherry yellow blossoms — that really do smell like chocolate and a Desert Willow, that isn't really related to the willow, but is a small tree with slender willow-like leaves and purple blossoms so stunning, they look unreal.

The Prickly Pear cactus flowers only last for a day, like many cactus



LAURIE WELCH, TIMES-NEWS
A delicate Apache Plume shrub at the Orton Botanical Garden on June 28, 2021 in Twin Falls.

tus blossoms, Orton said, and each flower on the Prickly Pear starts off yellow morphing to orange followed by pink at the end of the day. The Agave century plant, a long-leaf succulent, does not bloom for decades, depending on the climate. Many species flower only once and die.

The pups, or offshoots from the original plant, will then take its place, Orton said.

Yucca plants need Yucca moths to pollinate, but the drought-tolerant plant is not native to Idaho, so there are no moths to pollinate them — or are there?

Until this year the Ortons never

had any Yucca plants develop seed pods, but this year there are pods dangling from some of the stalks.

Whether or not the seeds will be viable — has yet to be determined, Orton said.

The Ortons don't use any insecticides in the garden and rely on natural methods, including the



DREW NASH, TIMES-NEWS
Drought tolerant plants are increasing in number Monday, June 28, 2021, around County West in Twin Falls.

introduction of natural predator insects or by using pure cinnamon to get rid of ants.

"Many people don't realize that 90 percent of the insects are beneficial or benign," Orton said. And they can help promote the overall health of the garden.

To learn more about water conservation gardening and native plants visit Orton Botanical Garden, Idaho Native Plant Society, which has a Twin Falls chapter called Loasa, University of Idaho Extension Office in Twin Falls which has some water conservation demonstration gardens at the Twin Falls County office and Native Roots, a nursery and farm that specializes in native plants.



LAURIE WELCH, TIMES-NEWS
LaMar Orton talks about the species of drought-tolerant grasses, at the Orton Botanical Garden in Twin Falls.



DREW NASH, TIMES-NEWS
Andy West, a University of Idaho extension educator, talks about drought-tolerant plants Monday, June 28, 2021, around County West in Twin Falls.



JONATHAN INGRAHAM, TIMES-NEWS
Grizzlybear Pricklypear cacti lay in a bed at the Orton Botanical Garden, as seen Saturday, June 26, 2021, in Twin Falls.