

Climate zones

Whenever a person decides to establish a garden, or re-establish one, it makes sense to do everything that can improve chances of success under our challenging desert conditions. This has to hold true whether growing a few vegetables or a formal perennial border.

You can have formal perennial borders even here in the Mojave. It will take creativity and work, but it is possible. No matter what kind of garden, though, most likely it will mean improving the local soil *by using compost* and installing a reliable irrigation system.

The most important thing any gardener can do is find the right plant for a spot.

Of course, personal preference is going to be primary. Will a particular plant look good? When mature, will it be the right size, have the right flower color, produce the right shape of leaf? Will this group of plants work – similar soil, light and water requirements? These questions are related to the gardener's own aesthetic sense. Other aspects are outside of the grower's control.

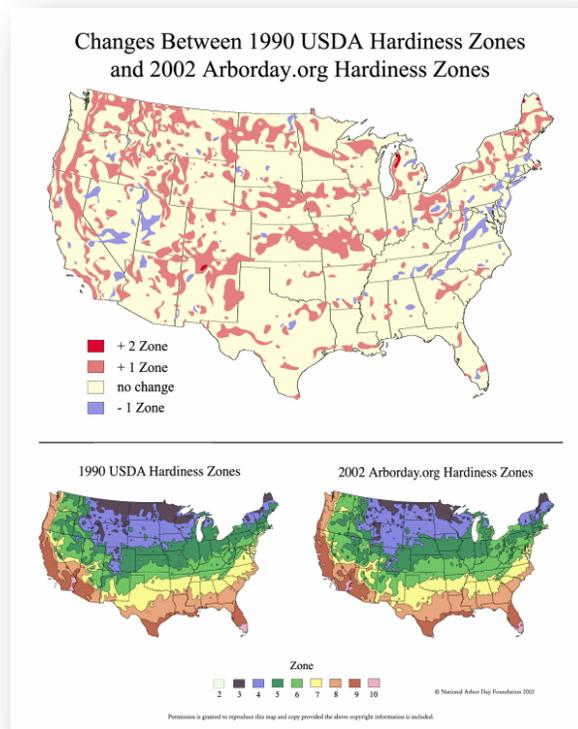
Our intense sunshine can savage certain leaves. Not all plants survive in all climates. Careful and accurate selection can make a garden a center of healthy flowers, vines, shrubs and trees.

A few guides have been developed to help with selection. They are maps of “climate zones”. Horticulture books and the tags on many plants mention the ‘plant hardiness zone’. Every location has a zone number, and depending on the guide, the zone number represents some factor or group of environmental conditions.

The best known guide is from the US Department of Agriculture, which breaks the whole country into ten regions, based on the average minimum temperature. These zones are important in many agricultural areas, where freezing temperatures can devastate crops. It is also a very good way to determine what plants will be able to survive over the winter.

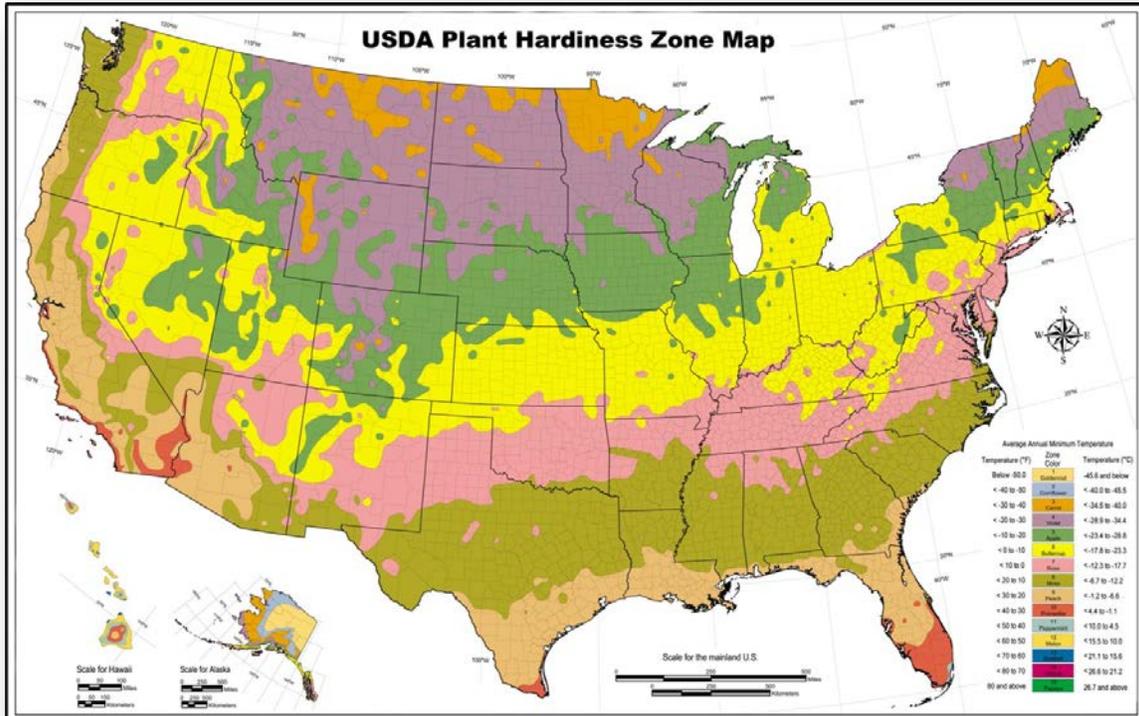
A similar guide is from the American Horticultural Society - the Plant Heat Zone map. Many plants suffer once temperatures exceed 85°; this map indicates the average number of days over 86° in each of 12 regions in the country. When used in conjunction with the USDA system, it gives an idea of what plants survive in different climates. Southern Nevada is in USDA zones 8 and 9, meaning that average winter temperatures are the low 20's. The heat zone map puts the region in zone 9. Using both, one can get a sense of what plants will grow in our temperature range.

Another popular system is designed for the west– the Sunset zone map. This detailed system gives more detailed information than the others do. By looking at latitude, elevation,



ocean influence, continental air influence, mountains in the area and the local topography, this system breaks the western US into 33 regions. Southern Nevada, zone 11, is described as having “sizzling” summers, winters with up to 85 days below freezing, and scant rainfall.

With these guides, gardeners can select plants that have the best chance of thriving in our climate. We need all the help we can get!



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