



Get local garden information

Some plants – trees, vegetables or flowers – are impractical or unsustainable for growing in the desert. That does not mean it cannot be done. Seasoned gardeners in southern Nevada know it is possible to grow almost anything here, assuming the necessary resources are available, which they rarely are.

Non-horticulturists have a hard time believing this, and sometimes dissuade others from creating their own gardens. Inexperienced gardeners, or those who are new to the region, often start their efforts with trepidation, having heard that conditions in this part of the country make gardening impossible. These brave people are eager for helpful information, but may find that they are reaching out to sources that are unfamiliar with the unique challenges of life in the Mojave. In the world of horticulture, there is no one size that fits all.

For instance, few parts of the country have the high levels of salts that are present in local soils. When experts advise applying conventional fertilizers, Epsom salts or other products, they may not be aware that they are instructing people to increase the salinity of their growing medium, whether that be soil or potting mix. In this region, with only four inches or less of rainfall, salt buildup is common. You have likely seen a white ring on the surface of the soil around a plant. You were probably looking at a salt deposit, a remnant of the ancient ocean once covering this land.

Before and after using any of these products, the soil must receive ample irrigation to insure that excess, saline water drains away from the root zone. Otherwise, the roots can be damaged. In fact, sometimes elements in the salts may cause problems with the plant's use of essential mineral nutrients. The result is a plant with "salt burn", a brown perimeter around leaves.

Some things might seem at first obvious, but not if you are accustomed to life in other places.

The USDA growing zones are an example. Almost everyone knows that the country is divided into ten growing zones, some of which have been further broken into subzones. Much of Southern Nevada is in zones 8a, 8b or 9a, but what exactly does that mean?

The US zone map indicates that these are not necessarily the zones for optimal gardening. They are hardiness zones: areas with a similar range of minimum annual temperatures. Conditions are astonishingly cold in some of the zones, for example International Falls, Minnesota, where winter minima can be more than 40° F below zero. While cold can certainly be a problem in the great American Southwest, a more pressing issue is often the opposite – heat. For more information on the balance of conditions that local gardeners must face, two other sources are



available. Both the American Horticultural Society and the Sunset Garden book have created systems that build on the USDA map. These are available for purchase on their websites.

There is a piece of advice that every new gardener should receive: get gardening information from people familiar with local growing conditions.

For more information, contact the Master Gardener help desk at 702-257-5555 or email lvmastergardeners@unce.unr.edu.

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