Establishing Plants for the Dry Season

Peggy Campbell

Step 1 – Understand Your Soil's *Non-Living* Matter (Sand / Silt / Clay)

= soil texture / type

- Indicates how readily water moves *into* & *through* it
- Formed over millennia … you cannot change it

How (three options):

1) Soil "jar test" (can do at home) – view online videos
   - Instructions: https://clemson.edu > Search > Jar Test
   - Enter results into downloadable "soil texture calculator" spreadsheet, https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/resources/education-and-teaching-materials/soil-texture-calculator
2) Soil ribbon test (can do at home) – view online videos
3) Soil texture analysis through a soil testing lab – follow lab's instructions

Step 2 – Improve Your Soil's Structure (*Living* Matter) … to:

- Improve soil's water holding capacity *and* drainage
- Grow healthier plants & deeper roots

Method:

✓ If the area is *not yet* planted
- TIMING: *when the soil is moist but not soggy*
- Dig 2 to 4 inches of compost into the soil to a depth of 8 to 10 inches. Afterwards, cover the area with mulch

✓ If the area already has roots growing there –
- TIMING: *October – May … when soil is moist*
- Simply cover the soil with **mulch…**

Planting Area	***Mulch to Use*** *(depth matters)*	
shrubs, trees, woodland plants	Woodchips* (3 to 4")	Leaves (2 to 3")
ferns, perennials, bulbs	Leaves (2 to 3")	Coarse compost (1 to 1.5")
vegetables	Straw (1 to 1.5")	Coarse compost (1 to 1.5")

**Woodchips* – sign up to receive an entire load FREE: www.chipdrop.com

Step 3 – Select Plants known to thrive in your Soil + Light Exposure

The Plant List..... www.savingwater.org, Lawn & Garden
King County Native Plant Guide..... www.kingcounty.gov, Native Plant Guide
Bellevue Botanical Garden..... www.bellevuebotanical.org, Collections Search
Great Plant Picks..... www.greatplantpicks.org, Plant Lists

Helpful Observations:

If your soil is:	Select plants known to be:	Considerations:
Texture: Sandy to sandy loam *Digging*: Easy, yet soil doesn't always hold together Well-draining; does not not moisture well Water *always* soaks into it	✓ Drought tolerant ✓ Suited to dry sites ✓ Many natives ✓ Mediterranean plants	"Drought Tolerant" section of The Plant List (www.savingwater.org) Keep soil *covered* with coarse mulch to help keep soil moist in summer. Leaf characteristics often include: ✓ greyish green ✓ waxy ✓ thick or leathery ✓ narrow, small, or tiny
Texture: Sandy – Loamy – with some clay *Digging:* Easy, "friable", full of clods (don't break them up!) Moderately-draining Water soaks in to moisten soil, yet soil is *never* soggy	✓ Suited to many soil types ✓ Many natives ✓ *Avoid:* moisture-loving plants	Keep soil *covered* with coarse mulch to create friable soil. Wide range of leaf characteristics
Texture: increasing amounts of clay (not a bad thing) *Digging:* Hard, especially when dry in summer Moderately- to poorly-draining Soil stays wet in winter & dry in summer	✓ Suited to wet winter / dry summer soils ✓ Many natives	*If the soil is compacted OR if bark mulch has been regularly used:* "scarify" or scrape the soil with a stiff rake, then cover it with coarse mulch "Wet Winter/Dry Summer" section of The Plant List (www.savingwater.org) "Zone 1" plants in the *Rain Garden Handbook for Western WA* Avoid walking on or working it when soil is wet. For pathways, use coarse mulch, pavers, or crushed gravel
Texture: Clay; possibly naturally "hydric" soils Poorly-draining Soggy much of the year	✓ Moisture-loving ✓ Tolerant of inundated or saturated soils ✓ Many natives	"Moisture-Loving" section of The Plant List (www.savingwater.org) Seek out plants that *thrive* in moist soils, including the many PNW natives for these conditions Leaves may be medium to large

Step 4 – Wait Until Fall to Plant *(when soil is moist from steady rain)*

Plant Right:

1. Find the root flare … keep it exposed & above ground
2. Tussle the roots
3. Use your native soil
4. Apply mulch (keep it the width of your palm away from the stem)
5. Water deeply

Step 5– Practice Smart Watering in the Dry Season

Smart Watering Tips:

- ✓ **Water Deeply, and less frequently**
  - 1" of water per week … vegetables, lawns (to stay green)
  - 1" of water per month … "golden" lawns (dormant)
- ✓ **Tools to make every drop count**
  - Soaker hose
  - Drip system
  - Quick-disconnect couplers
  - Straight-sided cans to measure water depth
  - Irrigation audit

Resources – local & reliable

Natural Yard Care..... https://cascadewater.org/water-efficiency/natural-yard-care/
Garden Hotline .....help@gardenhotline.org, (206) 633-0224, www.gardenhotline.org
Tilth Alliance (edible gardening).....www.tilthalliance.org
Find an ecoPRO Sustainable Landscape Professional ..... www.ecoprocertified.org

References for Gardening West of the Cascades

Grow Your Own Native Landscape, MISC0273, Washington State University Extension Publications, (No longer printed, yet PDF available to download for under $10) https://pubs.extension.wsu.edu/grow-your-own-native-landscape-a-guide-to-identifying-propagating-landscaping-with-wwa-native-plants-2

Maritime Northwest Garden Guide, Tilth Alliance (edible gardening)

Pacific Northwest Month-by-Month Gardening, Christina Pfeiffer

Rain Garden Handbook for Western WA, Ecology (free download), https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/documents/1310027.pdf