

With the upsurge of people spending more time in their gardens, lockdown has been a good opportunity to really get to know your conditions and what works best in your soil.

Mother Nature has been really prevalent in our minds this year, from the floods of winter, through the warmer than usual spring, to the predictions of continuing hot, dry summers. Working with nature means adapting to our changing world, which is bringing increased heat, as well as periods of both drought and heavier rain.

Making our gardens more resistant to drought is becoming more important, by considering plant choices, soil cultivation and maintenance needs. For hot, dry summers, evoking the Mediterranean is one way to experiment with an array of different plants; whether creating a little corner that conjures up that holiday feeling we are all needing, or transforming larger areas to decrease the need for watering. In fact there are already many plants we grow in our gardens from the Mediterranean region as the UK climate of warm, dry summers and mild winters, particularly in the south, is very

suitable for a range of choices.

We don't need to dig up our existing gardens but rather augment with some robust choices. The right plant in the right place is particularly important, so do really get to know your soil and climatic conditions.

The Royal Horticultural Society believes that plants and their placement hold the key to mitigating some of our biggest environmental threats. Many drought-resistant plants naturally form communities of plants that thrive in the same conditions. There are certain characteristics to look out for. Grey-green and silver leaves reflect the sun's rays, conserving moisture in the plant; small narrow leaves are another indicator as they transpire less water; and reflective, glaucous, waxy coatings are adaptations for surviving in hot, dry environments. It's also a good idea to plant immature, small plants as they will be more resilient and adapt as they grow.

Prepare the ground by cultivating deeply, adding in some grit and organic matter to accommodate the free-draining plants. Raised beds are useful to increase drainage. Before planting soak the plants in a



Too HOT to handle?

Work with nature to create glorious gardens that will withstand our Great British weather

WORDS & PHOTOS: Leigh Clapp



Raised beds in Jane Jordan's garden aid drainage and are easier to maintain

bucket of water until bubbles rise to the surface. Thoroughly water in plants for the first season and then once established, they will be more drought resistant. Planting 'en masse' to cover the ground preserves the soil from being washed away, keeps weeds down and retains humidity in the soil as a reservoir for periods of drought. Mulching with pebbles or gravel will reflect the heat and light, keeping roots moist and cool as well as suppress the weeds. Further well-composed green mulches applied each year will keep roots protected and fertilise the plants. Keep an eye on the health of the plants, if they seem a bit stressed from the heat, give them a good watering and keep on top of pests.

Garden designer Adam Vetere has developed a range of micro-climate areas in his garden, Old Camps at Headley.

"With our changing climate,



Echinacea are robust in heat and cold

both the desert garden and Mediterranean terraces are becoming increasingly sustainable. Both were planted in 2011 and they haven't been watered since, apart from the bedding in period, plus the maintenance is minimal too. I normally give the plants a prune every three years and that is that!" he comments.

Get the look

1. Water is a limited and valuable resource, collect rainwater in tanks and water butts and be waterwise.
2. Drought-resistant Mediterranean plants prefer free draining ground so don't plant on a site that is waterlogged in winter.
3. A south facing site with sun all day, and also in winter, away from frosty cold air is ideal.
4. A gravel garden is a great option – low maintenance and no lawn to mow! Select a sunny, well-drained, weed-free area and although any soil type is possible, a sandy or gravelly soil works best.
5. Silver leaved plants may succumb to wet, cold winters, but many are easy to propagate and will grow quickly for summer displays.
6. Choosing plants that tolerate hot, dry conditions ensures colour through to autumn, such as eryngium, perovskia, cistus, helichrysum, salvias and lavender.
7. Using different plants may mean that the feel of the garden will change, but dramatic plantings can easily be achieved from plants that have very low moisture and maintenance demands.
8. Don't be afraid to prune and clip rosemary, lavender and cistus after flowering, they can become leggy and woody very quickly and an annual trim will prolong their lives.
9. With the vagaries of the British weather, include plants that stand up to the heat and also cope with the cold and wet as well, such as birch, berberis, geraniums, miscanthus grasses, sedums, geums and daylilies.
10. Effective drainage is the key to resolving winter wet, including using permeable surfaces. ▶

Some of Adam's recommended plants include *Trachycarpus fortunei* (Chusan palm), figs, *Chamaerops humilis* (dwarf palm), olives, yucca, agapanthus, echeveria, aloes and cordyline.

"With fierce drainage underneath, the plants are extremely hardy, with the olives and palms surviving -15c. We are also installing a rainwater harvesting system which collects water from our roof, with a 10,000 litre tank which will irrigate the remaining areas of the garden very efficiently, thus cutting our water usage and reducing our waste.

"As far as surfaces, consider a SuDS (sustainable drainage system) surface, such as gravels, resin bound gravel or clay pavers laid tightly, but without grout. The sub base must be type 3 to allow drainage," he explains.

I also chatted to head gardener John Wood from the National Trust's Hinton Ampner, about the climatic challenges we face.

"The problem is that we are getting more extremes and less predictable seasons. Hot sun and drought one week and then torrential downpours the next, and strong winds on a regular basis. Good plant husbandry has never been as important to combat these extremes. You can get the best idea of what's in store as far ahead as you can. Gardening activities can then be planned to optimise weather conditions. Planting can be timed to coincide with rain coming or be prepared to protect your plants



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Garden notes

Some NGS and National Trust gardens are now beginning to open. You can keep an eye on their websites to find out what you can visit and when.

Old Camps, Headley opens through the National Garden Scheme, ngs.org.uk

Adam Vetere Gardens, adamvetere.co.uk

Hinton Ampner, nationaltrust.org.uk

Jane Jordan garden design,

janejordangardens.co.uk

Anne Keenan garden design,

annekeenan.co.uk



if temperatures suddenly drop. Cover the ground with plants to prevent erosion and keep the soil cool. If you look around your local hedges, woodland and wild places you will see that in the natural world plants do not grow in isolation from bare soil. They form a community, growing through each other fighting for light by creating a canopy of trees, mid-storey of shrubs and then ground cover planting with thick mulch, which is important for a healthy mycorrhizal community,” he advises.

Other tips John suggests are to build on what does well in your garden and locally, to find further robust cultivars of those species, such as the versatile options of different euphorbias; which include ground covers and ones for shade or sun.

“Some plants seem bulletproof and adaptable to a variety of situations. *Parrotia persica* (Persian ironwood) is a lovely tree that we grow at Hinton Ampner. Despite being in the Hamamelidaceae family it is quite happy in the chalky dell.

Parrotias also seem very resilient to honey fungus and we have a very healthy specimen in the church bed where many other trees have died. Gardeners are very resourceful, and this will ultimately prevail in these times of change. Experimenting with different plants, creating little microclimates of interest and dealing with whatever the weather throws at us in the future,” he adds.

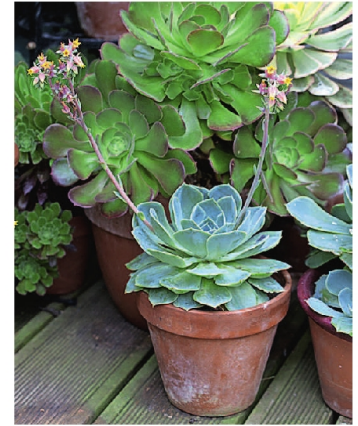
Jane Jordan has been designing gardens in Hampshire over the past eleven years and feels the starting point has to be really getting to know your soil, improving it where needed and adding organic matter when planting.

“Planting in spring or autumn is always best as it gives plants time to get their roots down before putting on growth and coping with hot weather. However, if you can’t avoid planting in warmer weather then the ‘puddling in’ technique will really help. I tried this out last year and it worked a treat; with no additional watering needed

TOP LEFT: Be brave for dramatic effects

TOP RIGHT: Succulents are drought tolerant and easy to propagate

LEFT: Drought tolerant design by Jane Jordan with stipa, hebe and *Verbena bonariensis*



after the plants went into the ground. It involves digging the hole, then dumping a whole bucket of water straight into it, then plunging the plant into the water, before backfilling. Lightly press the soil down but don’t heel in. No surface watering is needed and resist the temptation to do so; you need to grow your plants ‘hard’ so that they can tough out difficult conditions and resist pest attacks.

“Wind-proofing is another important factor, as wind is very drying and can scorch plants. Windbreaks in the form of hedges or climbing plants are ideal, and consider the prevailing wind direction when putting plants in, creating buffers with sturdier plants where you can and staking where needed,” she comments.

Garden designer, Anne Keenan, who is based in Goodworth Clatford, offers some further tips to help weatherproof your garden.

“Use *Euphorbia palustris* instead of *E. wulfenii* where winter conditions are wet and you want a lime green colour in spring. When paving include roomy open joints and fill with gravel to aid drainage. Once you’ve assessed your garden conditions carefully and selected plants, also give thought to ornamental detailing and enjoying the space. Terracotta pots filled with zingy flowers, climbers scrambling freely over walls and dappled shade from vine-clad pergolas will contribute to the mood. Water features are a lovely way to add shimmer and sound and include lifestyle elements such as seating and dining spaces.” 