

think GLOBAL	GARDEN local
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by TODD DAVIDSON

When current global, environmental, or political affairs make us feel helpless, we must remember that we can make significant strides toward a sustainable world locally and daily. Personally, I prefer spending time in the garden – my own microcosm – to find peace, enjoyment, and hope during tumultuous times.



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WE CAN DO OUR PART TO SAVE THE WORLD BY applying sustainable principles in the garden. The garden is part of an interdependent, discontinuous ecosystem that doesn't stop at our fences or property lines. Close observation of the common pocket gopher's expansive and destructive tunnel system, which can connect through an entire neighborhood, clearly exemplifies this point.

A sustainable approach to gardening requires a regard for the ecosystem as a collective whole – from below the ground and up. Soil interactions, influenced by a myriad of influxes such as soil textures, presence or lack of organic matter, soil moisture, plant-root structures, fertilizers, pesticides, microorganisms, vertebrates, and more, are largely responsible for nutrition and overall plant health.

Most domestic garden soils may have undergone tremendous compaction from home-construction activities, concrete, paint and stucco washouts, and more. One of the best ways to buffer construction toxins in soil, improve soil structure, and welcome beneficial microorganisms, is to incorporate organic material, such as compost (free of pathogens). Additionally, slow-release organic fertilizers and mycorrhizal fungi may help a conditioned soil yield flourishing plant growth.

Above ground, we can find many more active participants in our garden's ecology. For example, plant pests such as aphids, mites, and mealy bugs may be sucking away on a favorite plant one sunny day. Before quickly loading a spray gun full of your pesticide arsenal for rapid revenge, look a little closer; parasitic wasps, lacewings, or ladybugs may already be consuming the lion's share of these pests. By spraying, we may kill beneficial insects and disrupt the delicate balance of the insect ecosystem.

A wide array of plant materials in the garden also helps attract a diversity of insects, birds, and other advantageous members of our garden's community. A rich variety of biological life perpetuates symbiosis and overall garden health. Indigenous plants have evolved with pollinators and seed disseminators over thousands of years, while many birds, insects, and other animals have evolved with co-adapted gene complexes for particular plants, furthering interdependence among plants and animals. With the right plants, you can attract nature's own garden fairies rather than buying man-made products and chemicals to do their work. Tubular flowers and those containing elongated stamens – like bottlebrush, California fuchsia, and penstemon – tend to beckon the hummingbird. Ripening

fruits, such as gooseberry, elderberry, and wild rose, along with worms and other insects, invite various other birds to feast. Large clusters of small flowers allow butterflies to probe for nectar with minimal leg movement, as seen with butterfly bushes, heliotrope, and milkweed. Beneficial wasps tend to gather around dense flower heads such as marigold, buckwheat, and yarrow.

Resource conservation and preservation is another cornerstone to sustainable gardening. Here in the arid west, water is unarguably the most precious resource. Planting large expanses of water-thirsty

turf grass is an irresponsible and needless waste. Californians work with landscaping paradigms intended for wet regions of the East Coast or England that are capable of supporting turf grass. Thankfully, progressive horticulturists and garden designers are taking the lead in integrating appropriate native grasses that use minimal water once established and require minimal mowing. One great example, the local dune sedge, *Carex praegracillis*, can be grown as a mini-meadow with wispy wiry texture or be mowed regularly for a formal look. A silvery Mediterranean meadow of Silver Sedge, *Carex glauca*, can also be established and

cared for with minimal resource consumption. The work of removing turf to implant native grass will pay off in the long run, for your garden and for the environment as a whole.

The idea of sustainability is to meet the needs of the present without restricting future generations from doing the same. Gardens are a great way to celebrate sustainability and preserve the Central Coast's unmatched outdoor lifestyle for posterity. Be kind and be well.



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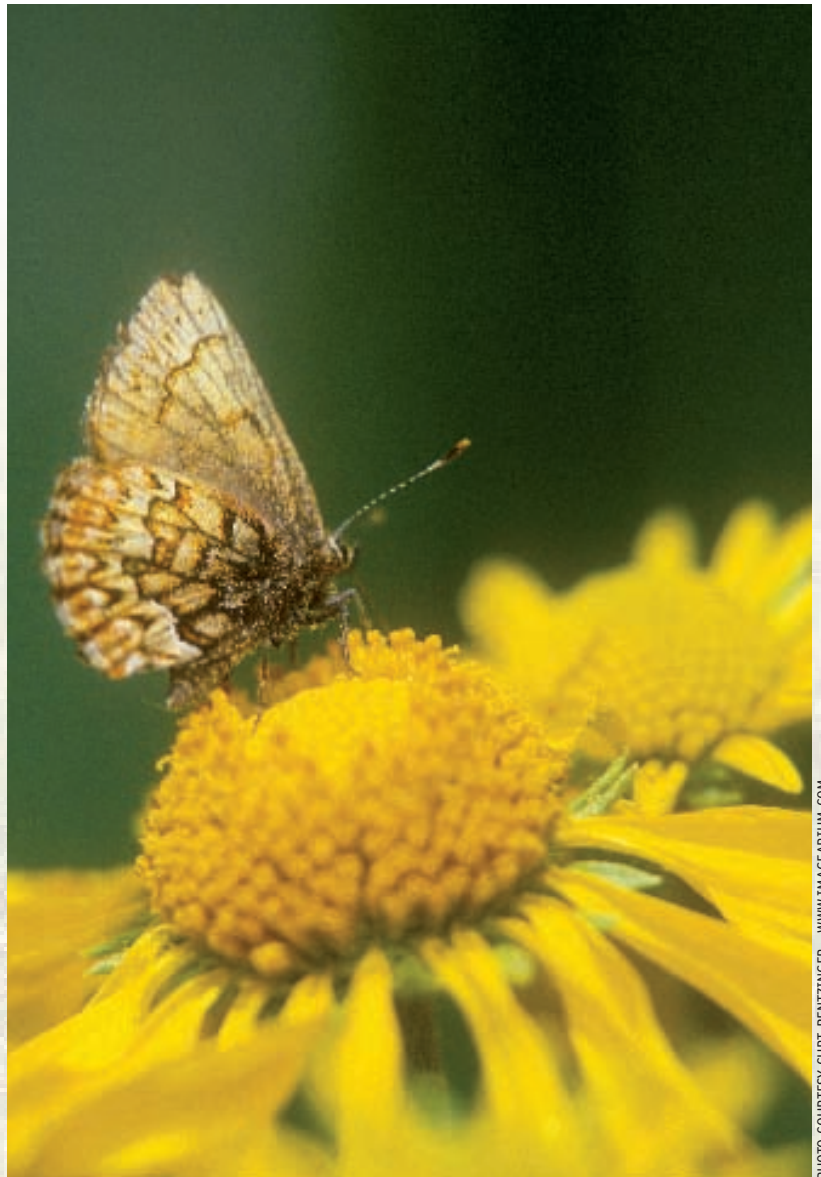


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