



# North Lake Tahoe DEMONSTRATION GARDEN



*The North Lake Tahoe Demonstration Garden is an educational community garden which promotes lake-friendly landscaping to help preserve our unique and fragile alpine environment*

## END OF SEASON TIPS

by Jan Steinmann



**Plant** trees, shrubs and perennials until you can no longer plant because of snow or frozen ground. You will need to water at planting and until the weather makes plants dormant. Dormancy means that the plant can concentrate on its roots without worrying about reproduction. (Let's face it, wouldn't we all enjoy an occasional dormancy?) Over winter, if a warm spell melts the snow for more than a few days, watering may be necessary, especially for new plants. The idea is to keep the roots in a moist environment so they can grow and establish themselves under the soil, and our Tahoe snow blanket usually accomplishes this.

**Mulch** flower beds and new plantings with (non-diseased) leaves, pine needles, or compost.

**Divide** iris rhizomes every couple of years to increase number of plants and invigorate flower growth. Plant spring-blooming bulbs and fertilize existing ones with bone meal a couple of weeks before continued freezing begins.

**Collect** seeds from your autumn perennials and annuals: Rudbeckia (various Black-eyed Susan), sunflowers, Galairdia (Indian Blanket Flower), Echinachia (Purple Cone Flower), and hardy asters. (It's too late for lupine or California poppy seeds.) These late summer flowers will spread themselves to some extent, but you can enjoy saving some of the seeds for spring or just till them lightly into the soil this fall. If the seeds "take" they will grow

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## From the President's Plot

by Mimi Komito

The leaves are turning color, the douglas chickory (brown tree squirrel) is hiding seeds in my herb pots, the bear is bending my pear tree to get to the fruit on the top (that I couldn't reach)... It must be fall! Another gardening year is coming to a close, just a little more raking and tidying up to do and nothing much else to do until it's time to leaf through the catalogs for spring seed ordering.



Mimi teaching a class

It is with mixed emotions that I am stepping down as president for the Demonstration Garden after 10 years at the helm. It's been a good run and I have enjoyed every moment. It is, however, time for someone else to take over, for new ideas to flow. I'm happy to say that I'm handing the trowel to two very capable women – Margaret Solomon and Cass Maller. They will be sharing the presidency to ensure that someone in charge will always be available. Both Margaret and Cass have been active in the garden as well as on the board for many years and I know the garden has a very special place in both their hearts. I am excited to see what new projects they will initiate in the garden in the coming years. I will stay involved as much as I can and probably still teach a class or two in the summer.

This past summer we finished the Butterfly garden demonstration with a few more plants and some wonderful interpretive signage (heartfelt thanks to Lesley Higgins). We also finished our defensible space demonstration with the integration of plantings and non-combustible materials around the shed as well as some new signs. The last large project of the summer was the "muffin" path, aka drivable grass walkway. This path has been a long time coming. The muffins are in place and some of the vegetation has been planted. In the spring we will sow seeds in the dirt pockets between the cement "muffins" and hopefully by mid-summer the path should look great.

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*(End of Season Tips cont.)*

roots over winter and bloom earlier than those planted in spring.

**Weed** in the autumn if you can still dig into the ground. Get the unwanted clover and grasses out before they have an entire winter to develop root networks (yes, this is what they do under the snow-we encourage this activity with perennials but not with weeds.)

**Tying up** trees and shrubs is always questionable for mountain gardeners. You see aspen and mountain ash and other natives tied up with by landscaping companies, and this certainly can't hurt. But is this really necessary for these hardy trees? In my experience, most resilient native plants like aspen, Mountain Ash, and serviceberry, don't need this protection. If they lose branches in winter snowstorms, they are probably planted in the wrong place. However, if you have a special, beloved plant that you want to protect, then tie it, mulch, and protect it as much as time allows. I have cherished and protected a redbud for many years and it rewards me with golden heart-shaped leaves every fall. Or if you have some beautiful (and expensive) Japanese maples, plant them far from any snow-load roofs, or keep them in pots that you can protect from winter damage.

**Don't prune** lilacs, crabapples, flowering plum or other spring blooming shrubs and trees. They have already started forming buds and you will cut off the new blossoms.

**Containers** of perennials can be left outdoors with a pine needle mulch but don't just forget about them since they will dry out more quickly than those planted in the ground. Water occasionally if we have no precipitation. Some tender potted plants can be kept inside for the winter. I've had good luck with geraniums and begonias which just need a bright environment to flower through winter, although they definitely like summer outdoors better.

*Start making plans for next growing season--we are, here at the Demo Garden!*

*(Presidents Plot cont.)*

Many educational events and classes were held in the garden this summer and they were well attended.

We hope to do even better next year and get the word out in the community.

The garden is a wonderful resource for gardeners in the community. Both novice and more experienced gardeners can benefit from our events and Green Thumb Thursday classes. We are also taking steps towards more involvement from student groups at Sierra Nevada College.



Dr. Shapiro's butterfly garden tour

Our web page, [www.demogarden.org](http://www.demogarden.org), is a work in progress and has a wealth of information on it. Information on all classes and events are available on the site, as well as a great photo gallery and links to other local web sites.

I look forward to another summer in the garden in 2011 and hope to see new and familiar faces at work days and classes. We cherish our volunteers and know that the garden could never be as wonderful as it is without you all!

See you down the garden path... *Mimí*

*Like what you see? Be a supporter - join at [www.demogarden.org](http://www.demogarden.org)*

**THANK YOU TO OUR FRIENDS!**

We would like to extend a heartfelt thanks for all the hard work and donations that made the new Defensible Space/BMP demonstration possible. Many people helped with this project:

**Troy Carson**, owner of F.W. Carson Co., donated the drain rock and cobbles for the shed demo. The staff of NTCD - **Jason Brand**, **Gretchen Huie**, **Lesley Higgins**, and **Dave Goodell** worked on ordering materials, installation, and sign design and printing. **John Cobourn** of UNCE helped with planning, design and installation. **Dan Yori** of High Sierra Gardens and **Erik Larusson** of The Villager Nursery donated plant material. **Forest Schafer** of the NLTFPD designed and installed the "bad DS" exhibit for the Wildfire Awareness Week event in July. Garden volunteers, **Heather Hall** and **Maryanne Schroeder** worked on the installation and general garden cleanup. **Ben Solomon** worked on the four sign installations.





# OUR SPLENDID CONIFERS

by Jan Steinmann

Our shimmering groves of golden aspen and streams gilt-edged by willows will fade in November. But while much of the country becomes drab and gray in winter, Tahoe enters another stage of seasonal splendor.

Surrounded by snowy mountains, our lake reflects clear blue skies and, best of all, stands of stately Sierra conifers. Sometimes iced with crystal, or on warmer mornings outlined deep green against the brilliance of cobalt sky and sparkling white slopes, the ancient giant evergreens are a dignified and somehow reassuring presence in our mountain landscape.

Native evergreen trees and shrubs adorn many yards, but some gardeners find themselves conifer-deprived. Some of the best trees are available at local nurseries but others are difficult to find. And not all are easy to transplant from your neighbor's yard. Following is a list of native evergreens that will grow in most Tahoe/Truckee yards:

**Incense Cedar:** This tree is so beautiful at every stage of development and we are very lucky, because Incense Cedars are fairly common at the lake and are reasonably easy to transplant, if friends have small ones. Here is what Incense Cedars have going for them: Lush, musky-spicy smelling foliage, deep green. Many branches in youth ("youth" will last much longer than most of us will), making a fine privacy tree. Gorgeous in old age, if you are fortunate enough to have one of the huge old codgers around—large corrugated sienna brown trunks, usually scarred by at least one lightning strike, some say by Native American "controlled burning," with gnarled and twisted limbs in a halo of green foliage outlined against the sky.



**Sugar Pine:** Not too many left, none in large areas surrounding Tahoe, so consider yourself blessed if you have one. The needles of this awe-inspiring pine are softer than those of the Jeffreyes or Ponderosas, so the tree has a tall, almost delicate silhouette against the sky. The cones are incredibly beautiful—over 1 foot long, polished and smoothly curving, these are the most lovely of Sierra pinecones, natural works of art as far as I'm concerned. Sugar pine seedlings can be transplanted, although you seldom see them at nurseries. The Forest Service occasionally has these and other transplants.



**Good Ol' Jeffrey:** Jeffrey Pines are stately survivalists—you can find tiny "bonzaied" Jeffreyes growing out of boulders. Hug one of these 200 ft. giants (strongly recommended!) and you will smell "vanilla" or "caramel" in the bark. Squirrels make sure that Jeffreyes reproduce—notice the shredded pine cones around your yard and all of the baby pines produced by pine nuts that the squirrels forgot. Jeffrey seedlings

are difficult to dig up and transplant, mainly because they have a very deep taproot. However, you can usually find young trees in local nurseries.



**White Fir:** Called a "trash tree" by many local mountain folks, these took over after large stands of pines were obliterated by miners, railroads, and other innocently forward-thinking entrepreneurs of the 1800's. However ubiquitous, the firs are gorgeous evergreens, quintessential Christmas trees. Mistletoe is a problem, but not insurmountable. They also reproduce all over the place but I don't think

the average gardener could transplant one successfully.

Of course, all of these trees are fire hazards if grown too close to the house—they need to be at least 10 feet from a structure and spaced so that their branches don't touch. But if you are fortunate enough to have some forever-green natives in your yard, do not "kill them with kindness" by overwatering or over-pruning, and certainly no fertilizer or insecticides, please! The trees and plants did very well before humans arrived and will probably continue to grow in beauty and dignity after we are long gone. Our stewardship consists of making sure that their native environment is protected, and considering ourselves fortunate to co-exist with these magnificent Sierra evergreens.





**FIRE-SAFE LANDSCAPING:** *Choosing and treating plants for fire risk*

by Lesley Higgins

Fire-safe landscaping is a form of defensible space that serves to limit the threat of wildfire spreading to or from a structure. It includes the selection and maintenance of plants for low fire risk. Sustainable fire-safe landscaping should be easy to care for with minimal irrigation. Keeping bare soil covered with vegetation and mulch is a Best Management Practice (BMP) to control erosion at Lake Tahoe, and employing a mosaic of non-combustible plants and mulch in the landscape will help to lower fire risk. The first step is to understand the fire risk of the plants in the landscape and treat them accordingly. The "Living with Fire: a Guide for the Homeowner" publication details how to implement and maintain defensible space and is available from local fire districts.

**What affects fire risk in plants?**

- ☞ Evergreen or deciduous - evergreen is higher risk
- ☞ Density and size of plant - more plant increases risk
- ☞ Age of plant - older plants tend to be drier
- ☞ Dead material - dry leaves and stems are combustible
- ☞ Spacing of plants - high risk plants can spread fire
- ☞ Proximity to structures - keep high risk plants away

**High fire risk plants**

Evergreen plants like these are high fire risk because they usually have lower moisture content, can contain flammable chemicals, and tend to grow in dense stands. Juniper is a non-native ornamental shrub that poses a fire threat when close to homes. Prune and space these kinds of plants to lower fire risk.



Huckleberry Oak



Tobacco Brush



Greenleaf Manzanita



Juniper

**Low fire risk plants**

Deciduous plants like those below are lower fire risk because they usually have higher moisture content, lower density of leaves and stems, and lack flammable chemicals. Herbaceous plants (without woody stems) and succulents possess the highest moisture content and have the lowest fire risk.



Thimbleberry



Creeping Snowberry



Mountain Spirea



Herbaceous plants