

Digging Deep-Gardening with Cynthia Brian Singing in the Rain!

“Spring is nature's way of saying, ‘Let's party!’” – Robin Williams



This cycad at the Ruth Bancroft Garden thrives in dry conditions. (Encephalartos horridus) Photos Cynthia Brian

With the imminent drought high on the radar, garden writers from around the Bay Area were invited for a private tour of the Ruth Bancroft Garden (<http://www.ruthbancroftgarden.org/>) in Walnut Creek to be reacquainted with the beauty of drought tolerant plantings. As Mother Nature would have it, on the day of this special excursion, the skies exploded and the rain came tumbling down. Only six writers, including myself, braved the wind, cold, and drenching downpour.

Clad in my hot pink fluorescent rain coat and boots, I slipped, slogged, and slid amidst the mud and the puddles admiring the vision and design of the vibrant 106-year-old Ruth. Echeverias, yuccas, agaves, aloes, cacti, gasterias, sedums, pines, palms, and eucalyptus glistened in their watery beds adding vibrant strokes of color, texture, and pattern to an otherwise dreary day.

As I danced in the much welcomed rain, the thought of returning to the days of water rationing when the mantra was “if it’s yellow let it mellow and if it’s brown flush it down” haunted me. With the winter hibernation over, our gardens awake from their winter slumber. For a gardener, this time of year normally proclaims the perpetual party of planning, preparing, and planting. But with irrigation availability as a major concern, we need to look at ways that we can save our landscape while conserving water.

Seventy percent of our planet Earth is covered in water, although less than 4 percent is fresh and only 1 percent is potable. Water is a precious commodity and a drought is a gardener’s worst nightmare. But exactly what defines a drought? According to the United States Geological Survey, a drought is defined as “a period of drier-than-normal conditions that results in water-related problems, ... the flow of streams and rivers declines, water levels in lakes and reservoirs fall, and the depth to water in wells increases. If dry weather persists and water-supply problems develop, the dry period can become a drought.”

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