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## IF-7 Right Plant, Right Place

### Key Points

- Study site conditions to determine which plants will grow there.
- Understand the requirements and growth characteristics of plants.
- Careful selection of new plants is very important in maintaining healthy, maturing plants.

When selecting plants for a landscape, gardeners need to consider several points very early in the planning process. Simply going to a garden center and picking out something pretty and planting it without considering several factors often lead to problems later. Healthy, vigorous plants are less vulnerable to attack by insects, disease or environmental problems. We have all seen plants that are constantly pruned to be kept in bounds, as well as weak, sickly trees struggling to live. The first step in creating and maintaining a healthy landscape is to choose plants that are suited to the conditions in your yard. Plants placed in a location that meet their requirements usually thrive and require little attention. As an example, consider the spectacular blooming rhododendron. They are very popular due to their bloom and evergreen characteristics. Rhododendrons require well-drained acid soil and shade. If planted in full sun or in a windy site, they will not do well. The points listed below can help a gardener choose plants wisely. Moana Nursery teammates are trained to ask questions and help you select the right plant for the right place.

### Know Your Landscape Conditions

The environment in your yard can change dramatically between the front and back yards. Trees (yours and your neighbors') and fences can also dramatically affect airflow and shade within your landscape. These microclimates are very important and need to be recognized. The southwest sun can be quite a problem, especially during a dry winter, for thin bark trees as well as broadleaved evergreens such as laurel, rhododendrons and Oregon grape (mahonia). Typical problems are sun scald and desiccation. Other yard conditions gardeners need to identify are temperature, windiness, soil texture, pH, saltiness and drainage. Natural precipitation in the Truckee Meadows is low, so supplemental irrigation is essential - gardens should be set up with sprinkler and drip irrigation. It is also essential to determine what setting the plant will be used in: open space, rock garden or around a pool. The Truckee Meadows is a Zone 2B by Sunset and USDA Zone 4 for trees; Zone 5 for shrubs and vines; Zone 6-7 for perennials and groundcovers.

One of the most overlooked conditions is the size of the area that is to receive the new plant. Often, decorative curbing, planters or mow strips will be placed too close to a house or walk, making the space too narrow or small to allow for plant growth and maturation, and at best limiting plant selection to annuals, perennials, climbers or trellis supported plants.

### Plant Requirements

Research and learn about the specific needs of a new plant before you buy it. Knowledgeable Moana teammates are a great resource for this type of information. Gardeners need to know if the plant will survive the coldest winters, with special consideration given to late killing frosts. It is imperative to know if the plant will need special soil, pH, drainage and water requirements. Special attention should also be taken to determine what the plant's sun or shade requirements are, as well as how big the plant is going to become at maturity. Space requirements are often ignored which leads to constant chopping back and excessive maintenance. While five gallon Colorado Spruces look quite small when planted three feet from the house, they'll require a 20 foot space at maturity. A common error is planting junipers too close together or to a driveway or sidewalk. In a few short years, they require drastic pruning to recover the sidewalk or driveway that they have overgrown.

Another plant feature that gardeners should study is the root system. Gardeners should understand if the plant's root system will invade or interfere with sidewalks or lawns. Pollen, fruit and thorns can also create a landscape nuisance. Some insects, pests and diseases occur on certain plants. Examples include mildew on euonymus and

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aphids on roses. On the other hand, many plants provide colorful foliage, bark or flowers, while attracting birds, hummingbirds or butterflies. All of these factors should be taken into consideration.

### **Plant Selection**

By carefully studying your site's conditions and the requirements of landscape plants, gardeners can create healthy, growing plants with low watering and maintenance requirements. Being informed about your site's conditions will help minimize pruning, seasonal protection and artificial controls of disease or insects.

Once you've become familiar with your yard's conditions and identified plants that match these requirements, the next step is to purchase a healthy plant. Always buy healthy, robust and thriving plants. The foliage color and leaf size should be normal for the plant and should be even and full all around without holes. Healthy plants will become established more quickly and easily with less susceptibility to insect or disease attack.

Remember that "bargain" plants usually have a lower rate of survival. There is usually a reason that these plants are such a bargain. There is a difference between bargain plants and plants that are on sale. Choose plants that have no signs of harmful insects or damage. The bark should be free of defects, splits and soft areas. The soil surrounding the roots should be moist and the roots should not be protruding from the drainage holes. Also, there should not be any sign of large circling roots and the rootball should be large enough to support the plant. Be sure that you are ready to plant before you buy new plants and bring them home.

Study the conditions in your landscape, learn the requirements of the plant and match them so that you have the right plant in the right place. This will ensure healthy plants that require less maintenance.

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