

Garden for the Environment + SFPUC's  
**Introduction to Sustainable Gardening Series**

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The Introduction to Sustainable Gardening Series is a three-part workshop series designed to help transform a backyard into a thriving, sustainable garden. This course will teach the basics for planting and caring for a flourishing perennial garden that saves water and attracts pollinators and beneficial insects.

Workshop 1: Sustainable Garden Design

Workshop 2: Water-Wise Gardening

Workshop 3: Organic Pest Control

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**PART I: SUSTAINABLE GARDEN DESIGN**

**Goal:** Learn to evaluate garden spaces and understand the principles of right plant, right place.

**Agenda**

1. Introduction – 15 minutes
2. Lecture – 45 minutes
  - a. Sun/shade patterns
  - b. Soil types
  - c. Summer-dry climates and hydrozoning
3. Hands-on Practicum – 45 minutes
  - a. Analyze light, soil, etc. in garden area to be renovated
  - b. Discuss ideas for what plants to add and how to design the space
  - c. Start removing old plants and prepping the soil
4. Closing and Q+A – 15 minutes

**GFE will provide**

- Flags for part A
- Jars and soil for shake test for part B
- Handout for determining soil texture with shake test
- Books for students to browse when choosing plants (Plants and Landscapes for Summer Dry Climates, Sunset Western Gardening Book, Golden Gate Gardening)
- Pruners and gloves for Practicum
- Evaluations for students
- \$10 Cole Hardware gift card for each student

**Introduction**

A GFE Staff person will introduce you to the group at around 10:05 and give out gift

cards. Re-introduce yourself (feel free to plug your work!) and mention that this workshop is Sustainable Garden Design, part one of three in the Introduction to Sustainable Gardening Series, and explain the goal for this workshop. Remind folks that this series is just an introduction – there is much more to learn by taking other workshops and consulting with folks at nurseries. There are also further resources at [www.gardenfortheenvironment.org/resources](http://www.gardenfortheenvironment.org/resources).

Then, make a brief statement about the value of sustainable gardening as you see it. Our design choices as gardeners at home and in our communities can support environmental sustainability and make our city more beautiful and healthy.

**A: Sun/shade patterns in outdoor spaces.**

- Explain the concept, and then break students up into small groups to study the exposures in four or five pre-marked spots (GFE has irrigation flags to use) around the outdoor classroom.
- Have them determine if each spot is full sun, full shade, or somewhere in between, and how this changes in summer and winter.
- Defining the different types of part shade exposure is usually the most intriguing part of this exercise.
- Some plants will thrive in one exposure and struggle in another.
- Wind and fog can also depend on your geographic location and where you have trees, fences, buildings, etc. on your property.

**B: Soil types.**

- Explain the differences between sand, silt, and clay, and where they are likely to occur in San Francisco gardens.
- Some plants will thrive in one soil but struggle in another. All soil types can be improved by adding organic soil amendments and mulch.
- Do a shake test, by adding soil and water to a covered jar and shaking it up. Set it on a table to allow the layers to form, so students can see that there is sand, silt, clay, and organic material in garden soil. While the layers are settling...

**C: Summer-dry climate plants and irrigation hydrozones.**

- Explain California's summer-dry climate.
- Plants need to be grouped together in the garden according to their water needs. Established summer-dry perennials need little/no summer water.
- Importance of good drainage.
- Lead the students on a brief garden tour, introducing some favorite summer-dry plants and briefly pointing out the different hydrozones in our garden (this will be covered in detail in Part II).
- Explain that plants from all over the world from summer dry climates can thrive in Bay Area gardens.
- Point out some of the plants from Australia, South Africa, the Mediterranean, etc.

- Discuss how different plants bloom at different times of the year and what you can do to always have something blooming in your garden year-round.
- Point out some of the design elements that make the garden look good.
- End up at the area to be renovated.

### **Practicum**

- Have the students analyze the sun/shade exposure, handle the soil, observe the slope, and discuss the frequency of summer irrigation in this section of the garden.
- Discuss basic design features, such as plant size, foliage contrast, four season interest, etc.
- Explain the renovation that they will start.
- Let them know that there are helpful plant lists of plants for dry shade, plants for sandy soil, etc.
- Begin making space by having the students remove unwanted plants, weeds, pruned branches, etc.
- Clean plant material should be chopped for compost, which gives an opportunity to talk a little about the importance of organic matter in soils.

### **Closing**

Return to the classroom to see the layers that have formed in the shake test (don't pick up the jar!). Encourage students to go home and assess their own spaces – they are welcome to map or sketch out their yard based on sun, soil, wind, etc., sketch out some design idea for their space, and bring it in to next week's workshop to get advice. Answer questions, fill out evaluations, and make sure any latecomers find GFE Staff to get a gift card. Try to end the class on time (12pm).