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How To Make A Rancho La Puerta Garden At Home - Wherever You Live

Design Principles:

Foliage, Foliage, Foliage

Use blue, variegated, yellow, bronze, purple foliages and mix in a variety of textures – spiky, lacy, fluffy. Foliage lasts, while flower is fleeting.

Layering

Get rid of the lawn, and create layers of tall trees, understory trees and tall shrubs, small shrubs, perennials, annuals, vines and groundcovers. A wide variety of plants equals a healthy garden, especially if you mix in a few natives to encourage the bug, bee, and bird populations.

Cover the Ground

Plant thickly. For that lush, tropical look and to keep down weeds and prevent water evaporation. Encourage self-seeders like *Verbena bonariensis*, poppies, *linaria*, lady's mantle and love-in-a-mist.

Practice Zonal Denial

Pay attention to your hardiness zone – you can't grow a plant hardy only to zone 10 (lows 30-40 degrees), if you live in zone 5 (lows to -20), except, of course, as an annual. That said, don't worry about it too much, as each garden has its own microclimates. Give plants you love a chance, as they may well die back to the roots in a cold winter then reappear in the spring. It is worthwhile, in the case of jasmine or bougainvillea just to grow as an annual and start over the next year. It is so much more than minimum temperature that makes plants hardy or not – depends on soil, rainfall, humidity, heat and each year's weather.

Plant Aromatics

Sometimes we forget there's more to gardens than the visual – choose perfumed plants to add another dimension to your garden. Most plants have a fragrant alternative – there are even scented daylilies. Why not choose the one with perfume? Scent is our most primal, basic sense, and is the most connected with memory. Look for plants with aromatic foliage, like scented geraniums, santolina, lavender, and lemon verbena. The most extravagantly scented flowers include jasmine, lily-of-the-valley, roses, witch hazel, daphne, hyacinths, wisteria, lilacs, lilies and mock orange.

Color and Texture

Bold and bright colors bring warmth and excitement to the garden. Color is pure emotion, so use the colors you love best. If you mix in plenty of green, grey and gold foliages, it will soften the colors and ease the transitions between brights. Textural plants with spiky, pointed, pleated or felted leaves have nearly as much impact as color, and add richness and interest to the garden.

Go Organic:

Practice peace of mind by gardening organically. Avoiding all chemicals in the garden protects your family's health, saves streams and lakes from pollution, and best of all, allows birds, bees and butterflies to enjoy the garden too. Remember that poisons – and that is what they are – kill desirables like butterflies and ladybugs as surely as they kill aphids and mites. Three principles of organic gardening: Feed the soil, plant a diverse group of plants (not a rose ghetto), and tolerate imperfections. So dig manure and compost into your soil, mulch, and plant the flowers and foliage that you love most.

Plants:

These hardy, non-tropical plants are used repeatedly throughout the gardens at the Ranch. Check their hardiness before planting, keeping in mind that the ratings are just guidelines.

Species roses, like *Rosa glauca*
Stipa gigantea (*feather grass*)
Nepeta (catmint)
Albizia julibrissin (silk tree)
Canna lilies
Rodgersia
Ligularia
Jasmine
Hardy fuchsias
Sedums – drought tolerant and tough
Nandina (heavenly or false bamboo)
Eucalyptus
Hardy palms

Scented geraniums
Acanthus mollis
Hardy palms
Abelia 'Edward Goucher'
Lavender
Rosemary
Cistus (rock rose)
Euphorbias
Senecio greyi
Cotinus (smoke bush)
'Diablo' ninebark

