



Backyard Habitat Checklist

Gardener's Name _____

Garden Address _____

Date of garden visit _____

The Resource Conservation District (RCD) is pleased to provide you with this assessment of the sustainability of your gardening practices. We borrowed the checklist below directly from Bay-Friendly Landscaping and Gardening Coalition, and hope to use it as a basis for providing you the technical assistance that you need to ensure that your garden builds healthy soil, reduces waste, conserves water, creates wildlife habitat, protects your watershed and ocean, and saves energy. Please do not hesitate to contact the RCD for more information or assistance.

Building Healthy Soil (Minimum 2 practices)

- Soil has been tested to identify need for appropriate amendments.
- Soil has been tested to identify any contaminants.
- Garden beds are prepared by hand rather than with a tiller.
- After initial preparation, beds are maintained with little or no tilling.
- Sheet mulching is used to establish planting areas or pathways, and as a way to control weeds while improving soil.
- Soil is protected from compaction with clearly defined paths and or raised beds
- Soil is amended with compost.
- Cover crops are grown to enrich the soil.

Reducing Waste in the Garden (Minimum 3 practices)

- Active compost bin or worm bin.
- Leaves, chipped plant debris, compost, or other organic materials are used as mulch.
- Garden trimmings are used on site for composting or mulching and/or disposed of in green waste cart.
- Plant waste is minimized by not overplanting, overwatering, or over fertilizing.
- Pruning is minimized by choosing plants that are appropriate for the space.
- Sheared hedges are not included in the garden.
- Clippings are left on the lawn after mowing.
- Recycled or salvaged products are used for artistic or functional purposes.

Conserving Water (Minimum 3 practices)

- Native and/or non-invasive plants are featured (more than 50% of the garden area is occupied by plants adapted to summer dry climate).
- Plants are grouped by water needs.

- ❑ Lawn is minimized or eliminated (less than 50% of garden area includes grass).
- ❑ Efficient irrigation (drip, timers, soaker hoses, etc.) is in place and functioning properly.
- ❑ Watering occurs according to need, not a pre-determined schedule.
- ❑ Mulch is used in garden beds.
- ❑ Rainwater collection or gray water system is in place.

Creating Wildlife Habitat (*Minimum 2 practices*)

- ❑ Food for wildlife is available through plant selection.
- ❑ Water is provided with a small pond, bird bath, or water dish.
- ❑ Year-round protective cover is provided with a planting of evergreen trees/shrubs, logs, rocks, or brush pile.
- ❑ Garden structure is diverse with layers of ground covers, herbaceous vegetation (non-woody) and/or grasses, shrubs of various heights, and trees.
- ❑ Wildlife is encouraged with a variety of plants that flower and set fruit at different times of year.
- ❑ Leave some areas of the garden somewhat untidy – let flowers go to seed to provide food for birds, and leave dead leaves and stalks to shelter over-wintering insects.
- ❑ Native plants are featured (more than 50% of garden plants are California natives).

Protecting Local Watersheds and the Ocean (*Minimum 2 practices*)

- ❑ Permeable materials are chosen for patios, driveways, or other hard surfaces, to allow water to soak in rather than run off.
- ❑ Steep slopes are terraced to reduce rainwater run-off and prevent erosion.
- ❑ Nearly all soil is covered by mulch or plants.
- ❑ Synthetic fertilizers are not used.
- ❑ No invasive species have been planted, and any invasive weeds on the property are being managed to prevent their spread. (Plants considered most invasive to the Bay Area include: Iceplant or Hottentot fig, Periwinkle, English ivy, Algerian ivy, Licorice plant, Scarlet wisteria, Broom, Pampasgrass and Cotoneaster.)

Contributing to a Healthy Community (*Minimum 2 practices*)

- ❑ An integrated approach is used for controlling weeds, insect pests and diseases with least toxic controls used first for safety of children, pets and wildlife.
- ❑ Pests and their damage are tolerated to the degree possible. Perfection is not the goal.
- ❑ Beneficial insects are encouraged through plant choice.
- ❑ Hand or electric tools are used instead of gas-powered tools.
- ❑ Potential neighborhood hazards are considered and controlled in the garden—including fire awareness, weed seed disbursement, and rodent habitat.

Saving Energy (*No minimum*)

- ❑ Trees and shrubs are selected and placed to reduce energy requirements. For example, deciduous trees are planted on the west side of the house to provide shade during the summer and allow sunlight to warm the house in the winter.
- ❑ Local garden products and suppliers have been selected.
- ❑ Air conditioner is shaded.
- ❑ Outdoor lights are energy efficient or solar.
- ❑ Pumps for water features are solar powered or energy efficient.