

Turn Up the Heat

Drought-tolerant plants for the landscape

Story and photos by Andrea Wilson Mueller



Red-hot poker (*Kniphofia*) adds brightness, height and contrast.

So you don't like to water? There are plenty of plants just for you and your garden in the hot, hot sun! Succulents, of course, herbs and many other plants will work for a hot place in the garden that requires drought-tolerant plants. Drought-tolerant gardens are beneficial to the Earth by requiring less resources and care, and are therefore beneficial to your wallet, too. A great way to start a drought-tolerant garden is to replace a portion (or all) of your water and fuel-absorbing lawn.

Drought-tolerant plants are also great for containers because they require less watering. In fact, once they are established, many plants won't require supplemental water during a summer with enough rain. Great examples are combinations of annual and perennial succulents, such as African bulbine (*Bulbine frutescens*), agave (*Agave* spp.) and a mixture of sedums (*Sedum* spp.). These combinations have a nice architectural effect, especially in more modern or eclectic gardens. Plus, your plants won't have to become martyrs of your vacation. You can leave them for one to two weeks at a time with no worries.

Any plant that can survive being planted in gravel or near the reflection of a hot, paved surface is definitely a worthy drought-tolerant candidate. Many varieties of lavender (*Lavandula* spp.) do the job in these spots. 'Hidcote', 'Munstead' and 'Provence' are tough varieties that prove themselves year after year. Aside from their delightful fragrance, they grow quickly, have very low water requirements, are low maintenance and act as a natural insect repellent. Along with the lavender, many easy-care Flower Carpet®

'May Night' salvia and variegated yucca love dry spots in the garden.



Recommended Hardy, Drought-Tolerant Plants

Perennials

Yarrow (*Achillea* spp.)
Agastache (*Agastache* spp.)
Agave (*Agave* spp.)
Purple ice plant (*Delosperma cooperi*)
Dianthus (*Dianthus* spp.)
Hen and chicks (*Echeveria x imbricata*)
Lamb's ear (*Stachys byzantina*)
Lavender (*Lavandula* spp.)
Red-hot poker (*Kniphofia* spp.)
Russian sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*)
Yucca (*Yucca* spp.)
'May Night' salvia (*Salvia x sylvestris* 'May Night')
'East Friesland' salvia (*Salvia x superba* 'East Friesland')
'Marcus' salvia (*Salvia nemorosa* 'Marcus')
Any succulent

Herbs

Oregano (*Origanum* spp.)
Purple sage (*Salvia officinalis* 'Purpurascens')
Tricolor sage (*Salvia officinalis* 'Tricolor')
Thyme (*Thymus* spp.)

Native Perennials

Butterfly milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)
Pale purple coneflower (*Echinacea pallida*)
Spike blazing star (*Liatris spicata*)
Wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*)
Sedum (*Sedum* spp.)

Ornamental Grasses

'Karl Foerster' feather reed grass (*Calamagrostis acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster')
Prairie dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*)
Little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*)
Big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*)

Shrubs

'Rose Creek' abelia (*Abelia x grandiflora* 'Rose Creek')
Lilac (*Syringa* spp.)
Roses, especially carpet roses (*Rosa* spp.)
'Buffalo' juniper (*Juniperus sabina* 'Buffalo')
St. Johnswort (*Hypericum* spp.)

Trees

Chaste tree (*Vitex agnus-castus*)
'Ivory Silk' lilac (*Syringa reticulata* 'Ivory Silk')

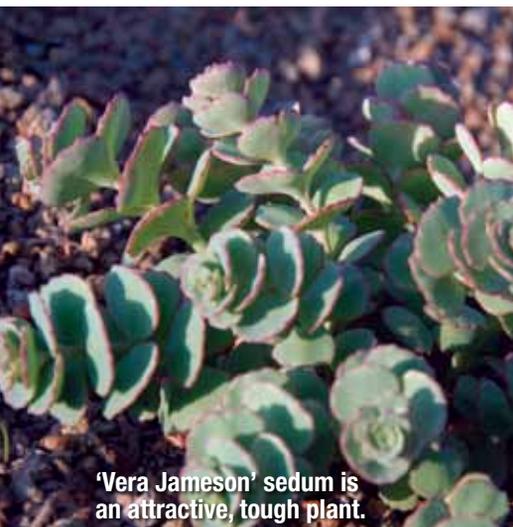
Herbs (such as thyme and oregano), lamb's ear, lavender, salvia, hen and chicks and red-hot poker make an excellent choice for this dry, sunny front landscape. ↓



This container of agave, sedum, African bulbine and aloe provides lots of texture and requires virtually no care. Really! I didn't water this container once last summer. ↓



Delosperma can take the heat!



'Vera Jameson' sedum is an attractive, tough plant.

and Drift® roses really set off the garden with long-lasting color (available in white, yellow, red, dark pink, light pink, coral and more).

Silvery complements of lavender, lamb's ear (*Stachys byzantina*), Russian sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*), salvia and dianthus (*Dianthus* spp.) are stunning in drifts or masses because of their varying textures and blooms. Due to their deep root systems and hardiness, most natives are usually a great choice. Pale purple coneflower (*Echinacea pallida*) mixed with spike blazing star (*Liatris spicata*) is a great combination for attracting butterflies and birds. You can't go wrong with butterfly milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), which is great for ornamental landscapes because of its bushy stature and bright, long-lasting orange color.

Once you have your design ideas in place, prep your soil with organic matter, just as you would with any garden (the most important step). With many drought-tolerant plants, especially lavender, we add sand to the soil mix. You do not want your drought-tolerant

plants drowning — they will quickly become unhappy and wither away. Also make sure that you include structural trees, shrubs and/or ornamental grasses to add interest and fill in gaps in the landscape when the perennials aren't there during the winter. Though I have mentioned rock mulch, I do not recommend it. Organic mulches are always best to finish up your project.

Going through this list, I noticed that most of these plants are also deer resistant — an added bonus. I am sure there are many, many more plants that could be added, but from experience, and in Kentucky zoning, these are some of my favorites. With the right combination of drought-tolerant plants, you will have a beautiful garden with minimal maintenance and water requirements. ♡

Andrea Wilson Mueller was raised in the horticulture industry by her dad, Charlie Wilson, and owns Inside Out Design, a landscape and hardscape design-build firm committed to sustainability, in Frankfort.