

Designing with the Natives

Written by Laura Lee Rose

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I just got back from a wonderful conference up in Cullowhee, NC, and wouldn't you know I'd have to learn some things that took me out of my comfort zone of landscape design. It's not fair to be an old gal and have to learn or relearn new tricks!

Given a blank slate or paper and some colored pens, garden designers prefer to group plants in 3s, 5s, 7s or 15s, to make a statement. That's the way we were taught to do it. We use mulch in between the plants to restrict the growth of weeds. It was pointed out, by more than one speaker, that natural plant communities just don't follow that bubble approach. Seeds are dispersed by wind, water, animals and us. If the seed lands on friendly ground it germinates. If germination occurs and the seedling isn't holding on tight enough, it might get washed away. If there isn't enough moisture, the young plant will dry up and return to the dust. Browsing animals may eat the tender leaves. It's a jungle out there and plants must develop successful survival strategies or die.

The point being that, in a natural setting, we find plants on every level from low, shallow

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