



Redwood Barn Nursery

1607 Fifth Street Davis, California

What's the most beautiful street in Davis?

Right now it would be Eighth Street. I urge you to take a walk, bike, or slow drive along Eighth from L Street and enjoy the beautiful garden, really three gardens all grown together in the front yards there.

This is one gardener undeterred by drought, water rates, or the fact that it's a bustling public thoroughfare. In fact, it is an exemplary garden for those seeking color in this fourth year of our epic drought. And all the plants you see growing? Easy as can be. Everything in this garden can be grown from seed, cuttings, divisions, or started from small seedlings purchased at low cost. Everything is tolerant of drought. And it's all in glorious bloom right out where everyone passing by can see it.

California poppies, Shirley poppies. Bachelor's Buttons. Dark purple-black bearded irises. A long border of gazanias crowding onto the sidewalk. Sunflowers just heading up, ready to bloom in a couple of weeks. A large bed of showy red geraniums in full bloom in front of the house next door.

Most of the flowers you see blooming there were planted in the fall. Sow seeds in early fall, or plant out seedlings September through November. The earlier you get them planted, the more flowers you'll have later. Poppies are best seeded directly, as they develop fragile taproots that are easily damaged in transplanting.

Maintenance of the poppies and spring-blooming annuals is pretty simple. After the blooms fade and the plants begin to decline, you simply pull them out and compost them. Leave them long enough to set and ripen their seed, and scatter it where you want plants next season. Watch for weeds that take advantage of the open soil between seasons. Or better yet, keep a succession of flowers planted to keep blooms coming in summer and fall as well.

- California poppy, the bright orange star of the show right now, can be perennial. If you cut it back when the seedpods have dried, rather than pulling it out, the plant will persist through the summer and begin to bloom again in the fall.
- Sunflowers can be planted anytime from February through June. Russian Mammoth is the heirloom variety grown for great size and seed. There are dwarf types that grow to a foot or so, pollen-less types for cut flowers, and varieties with branched flower stalks for more garden impact.
- Rhizome-forming irises can be purchased and planted in bloom, or dug and divided anytime July through December.
- Gazanias are purchased in six-packs, flats, or single plants at any time of year. There are lots of varieties available, with flowers in warm tones of pink, orange, yellow, and red, and some new ones with flowers 4 inches across! This South African native is right at home in our dry-summer climate. Blooms are heaviest fall through spring, with a hiatus in hot summer months.
- You can propagate common garden geranium (*Pelargonium x hortorum*, sometimes called zonal geranium) by simply breaking off a stem and rooting it in potting soil. Garden centers carry newer varieties that are shorter stature than the ones your grandmother grew. Unfortunately, geranium



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budworm caterpillars will attack the blossoms, starting in May and continuing for multiple generations through the whole summer here. An organic caterpillar spray will control them. Or just plant ivy geraniums (*Pelargonium peltatum*); the caterpillars leave them alone.

Continuing the bloom

With weather warming, you can start planting low-water annuals for summer color. Borage, cosmos, globe amaranth, portulaca, sweet alyssum, and zinnia are easy from seed or young plants.

Water every couple of days for the first two to three weeks, then gradually water less often until you are just giving them a good soaking every week or so. A soaker hose or simple drip system makes it easier. They'll reward you with a long season of summer bloom. Add a few plants of verbena, available in annual and perennial varieties and in a range of very hot, neon colors. Verbena loves heat and dry conditions.

Finally, now is the time to plant young starts of the meadow daisies that flower in late summer and fall: coneflower (*Echinacea*), gaillardia, and blackeyed susan (*Rudbeckia*).

Something new

Plant breeders have introduced a new set of hybrids in the last couple of years by crossing *Echinacea* with *Rudbeckia*. Created by traditional hybridization, these new plants are called Echibeckias. The bloom is spectacularly abundant and the color range crosses the pinks and reds of *Echinacea* with the oranges and reds of *Rudbeckia*. The question we all have is how perennial they will be in the garden. *Echinacea* species can be long-lived, but *echinacea* hybrids have generally been one to two year garden plants. Many *rudbeckias* are biennial (bloom the second year, then die). So while these are being sold as perennials, it is possible they will prove short-lived. The bloom is certainly worth it, but they may need replacement.

As you continue down Eighth Street, notice the showy rose hedge of red and white varieties a few houses down on the south side of the road. Then another display of roses and wildflowers at the corner of Eighth and Oak. A colorful mix of butterfly bushes, Santa Barbara daisy, and more perennial flowers at the corner of Eighth and B is just coming into bloom. And then you come to the glorious rose garden in front of the house that's painted fire engine red.

The Sadler rose garden

If there were a Davis Lifetime Achievement Award for gardening that benefits the public, it would go to Julia Sadler.

For six decades Davisites have been treated to the display of roses in her garden at the corner of Eighth and Miller. Julia tells me that she started planting roses out front there in 1955, two years after she and her late husband moved into the house. The varieties have changed over the years as she tries the newest varieties.



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Hybrid teas, floribundas, grandifloras, and miniature roses – the popularity of the different types of roses has waxed and waned over the decades. Consumers now want low-maintenance rose bushes and the industry has responded. Formerly considered high-spray fussy garden plants, modern landscape and shrub roses can fit into a low-maintenance garden.

But roses aren't particularly low water users. In keeping with the goal of water conservation, Julia has installed a drip irrigation system to water the bushes more efficiently. Each plant wants a few gallons a week, and the blooms and growth suffer if there is prolonged drought. Mulch can help conserve moisture. My own experience has been that cluster-blooming types look better during dry periods than long-stemmed cutting roses: consider planting more floribunda and shrub roses than hybrid teas.

Rose growers know that the first spring bloom is the most spectacular of the season. We also enjoy a grand show in the fall as the weather cools. Rose flowers don't hold up well in heat, and the bushes tend to bloom more lightly in hot weather. Dead-heading (removing spent blooms) can keep new blossoms coming. Rinsing the foliage early in the day reduces aphids and mites and keeps the plants healthier. If you have a persistent problem with powdery mildew on a variety, just prune it with a shovel and plant a different type. There are literally tens of thousands of rose varieties to choose from, so there's no need to coddle a fussy one.

Our thanks to these gardeners who create wonderful gardens out where the public can see them!



Poppies and gazanias in the foreground, irises and bachelors buttons in the background of this delightful garden on 8th Street near L. All easy to grow flowers for low-water gardens!



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Gazanias and California poppies in the foreground, with a bed of sunflowers getting ready to bloom in the background. Gazanias are planted out any time of year. California poppy seed should be scattered in early fall. You can plant sunflowers any time into July.



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Drought tolerant gazanias, natives of South Africa, edge the garden. Gazanias can tolerate drought and bloom heavily from fall through spring, with scattered bloom in summer months.



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A long border of gazanias, interspersed with poppies; California poppies and bachelors buttons in the background highlight this lovely garden along 8th Street in east Davis.



For six decades, the rose garden tended by Julia Sadler has been a treat for passersby along 8th Street. Shown here is Scentimental™, a Weeks Roses variety introduced in 1997.



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Shown here just past the first peak of spring bloom, Julia Sadler's rose garden provides a show for months. Note the drip irrigation line, providing water as efficiently as possible.