

How to Plant in Lamorinda's Microclimates

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An avocado tree thrives in a hillside Moraga garden.

Photo Cathy Dausman

"Climates are critical to the success and failure of crops," confirms Kenny Murakami, owner of the Moraga Garden Center. He recommends an analysis of the topography of each property to determine what to plant where.

"In winter on a slope, cold air is heavier than warm air, so it sinks. If your house is on the slope, cold air gets caught on the uphill side; then the cold air will go around [the structure of your home] causing a little triangle on the downhill side that's a little bit warmer," he explains. "If you have fences or shrubs, they will also deflect cold air. You can think of cold air as a thick viscous liquid and how it flows downhill in winter." Murakami says that avocados, which are very sensitive to frost, should be planted on the downhill side of a home.

Converse to winter cold, there is summer heat. "Lettuce does not like heat, so you can plant it on the east side of your tomato plants so the afternoon sun gets cut off," he suggests. In the sunnier spots he recommends tomatoes, squash, peppers, and melons, keeping the greens in the shade.

He agrees that the conditions in each garden are also linked to where people live. "The main factor around here

is the fog," he says. "Depending on when it sets in and burns out will create quite different microclimates." He does not recommend certain plants for the Lamorinda area, such as Kadota figs that require a lot of heat. "If you get closer to Concord you can get Kadota, but here in Moraga with the fog, you will have more success with Black Mission or Brown Turkey figs."

"Half of gardening is observing," states Murakami. He recommends that people watch the pattern changes with the seasons, and record observations year round. For example, people can record the exact time when fruit trees bloom and the associated conditions. Is it sunny? Windy? "If you do that over the years, you will notice slight differences," he adds. For ultimate information gathering, some gardeners install weather stations outside their homes; the data can be uploaded on a personal weather website and shared with weather networks around the world.

The Moraga Gardens Farm will sell its tomato, squash, pepper and herb plants every weekend from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. through April 19 at 1370 Moraga Way (next to the fire station). The Moraga Garden Center is located at 1400 Moraga Rd. For information about weather stations, visit <http://www.windandweather.com/weather-stations/weather-stations.htm>.



Fog at Lafayette Reservoir

Photo Kathy Bowles