While we shelter, gardening can help you – and our world. As we shelter in place, gardening – from a pot or planter on up – can help us connect with nature and the outdoors, engage children, relax, get exercise and fresh air, and more. **Here are some online tips and ideas for gardening in harmony with nature.**

For an overview, the Bay Friendly Gardening Guide, from Rescape (formerly Bay Friendly) offers 47 pages covering many ways that your garden could help the environment. If this seems a bit overwhelming, just explore and idea or two below.

Drought-tolerant gardening: Our Mediterranean climate with nearly all rain in winter, as well as recurrent droughts, make saving water basic to life in the Bay Area. The plant-finding resources listed below, and others offered by local nurseries open for pickup, can be filtered for drought-tolerant plants. UC's Master Gardener program has handouts including design basics (broad based with excellent links to more information). Stopwaste has info on converting your lawn to a low-water garden – and maybe get a rebate.

Gardening with natives: Native plants lived happily here on their own without us --so they generally can support local wildlife and biodiversity, reduce use of water and harmful chemicals, and save you time and effort. The Sausal Creek Gardener's Guide, from nearby Friends of Sausal Creek, has useful basic and local info.

To help you get to know gardens centered around native plants, the annual Bringing Back the Natives Tour has gone virtual, with live-streamed video tours on Sundays, April 26 and May 3 and 10.

The California Native Plant Society's Calscape has detailed information on native plants with many details for gardeners, including kinds of soil they like, how to maintain them, and much more. You can enter your address and generate lists by many characteristics, such as "fern," "succulent," "shade" or "butterfly host." Calflora's huge database offers similar information by clicking on "What grows here?" or "Planting guide," but it is somewhat more focused on wild lands.

Several native-plant nurseries, open for pickup, have extensive, searchable online information to help you decide. Examples are here, here, and here. You can search online for native-plant nurseries near you (online lists of these nurseries tend to be incomplete or out of date).

Gardening for pollinators, including bees and butterflies: The Xerces Society's resources for pollinator-friendly gardens include getting started, providing nesting, avoiding pesticides, lists of pollinator-friendly plants by state, and a pledge you can sign.

Extensive information on Bay Area bee gardens is here. The East Bay Regional Park District has a short video on bees and pollination as part of its Digital Learning Packages. Brochures on Bay Area butterfly gardens are available from the East Bay Regional Park District and North American Butterfly Association, which also has online brochures on basics and a certification program. As mentioned above, check your local nursery for searchable plant finders or lists of local butterflies. On the complicated question of gardening to save our once-spectacular Western monarch butterflies, read this.

Gardening for other wildlife: The National Wildlife Federation has encourages and certifies wildlife-friendly gardens. This Bay Nature Magazine article has tips on getting started, including in small spaces.

Besides the National Audubon Society's extensive resources on gardening for birds (including a sign for your garden), The Bay Area's Golden Gate Chapter has online brochures for gardening for birds and other wildlife for the San Francisco area, the East Bay, and in Spanish. The East Bay Regional Park District has short videos on backyard habitats and some common critters, as well as basic birding, as part of its online learning packages.

To identify the critters you see, check out Wildlife of the San Francisco Bay Area, or, if you can capture a photograph, use apps such as iNaturalist and its companion for kids, Seek.

Dealing with pests: One of the best ways to deal with pests is to plant tough, resistant plants in the first place. Beyond that, UC Agriculture and Natural Resources's Integrated Pest Management Program has massive amounts of information on dealing with potential pests in less toxic, environmentally friendly, and economical ways. Try their quick tips including info on beneficial bugs and help with challenges like aphids, slugs, and lawn. Another good source is Our Water Our World, supported by Bay Area water agencies.

Avoiding unwanted plants: There is no such thing as a "bad" plant. But manyare best kept out of gardens! Invasives can multiply your work or overrun your efforts – as well as destroy native habitat and diversity of plants and animals and costing billions to control. Even very pretty plants, like the oblong spurge shown, can be toxic as well.

Nonprofit Plant Right's resources for gardeners, include a list of invasives by California region and alternatives to invasives. The California Invasive Plant Council also has extensive information, including methods of control, but is somewhat more oriented to wildlands.

UC's Agricultural and Natural Resources (UCANR) lists toxic plants as well as those generally considered safe. Breathe California has tips on minimizing "hay fever," or allergic reactions to pollen.

Reducing runoff and water pollution: "Only rain down the storm drain" can inspire you to avoid garden chemicals and fertilizers (especially when it may rain) and minimize watering so that runoff doesn't reach storm drains or water bodies. Even plain water from EBMUD and other utilities is treated with chloramines that can be lethal to life in creeks. Our Water Our World's colorful fact sheets, some in Spanish, deal with many aspects of reducing and avoiding chemicals.

Your garden can filter out pollutants, reduce local flooding, and slow erosive high creek flows if you follow mantras like "slow it, spread it, sink it" or making your garden into a "green sponge." Check out fact sheets and tips from The Watershed Project, as well as has here and here. The State Water Quality Control Board offers short videos including building absorbent soils, using permeable pavers, disconnecting down spouts, and creating rain gardens, also called bioswales or bioretention areas. However, be aware of cautions (like these from Berkeley or the Contra Costa Water District) if you live in a slide area, have very heavy clay soil or a high water table, or where water could damage foundations or encourage mold.

Building healthy soils for sustainability: What we call healthy soil is a vibrant ecosystem, teeming with microscopic life that supports local plants and animals and retains and purifies water. There is no single recipe, and techniques abound. Garden soil also can bring to life techniques we need to apply worldwide to lessen global warming: Composting garden waste and food scraps rather than sending them to a methane-generating landfill, or planting a tree that stores carbon as it grows.

The East Bay Regional Park District offers a delightful video on soil health, for kids or adults, as part of its Digital Learnng Packages – check them out here. On a different level, the South Bay's Acterra has placed its April 14 panel of experts on healthy soils and carbon sequestration online here.