

Vegetation

No discussion of your home is complete without discussing the exterior grounds, grading and drainage, and vegetation. Even those with a “brown thumb” want plants for their homes, typically buying artificial plants for inside and hiring professional gardeners and landscapers for outside.

Problems with grading and drainage cannot be adequately determined during dry weather, so the first time it rains, you should get the umbrella out and walk around the property to see where the water is going. Before you even do that, though, make sure that your home has gutters and downspouts installed to direct rainwater away from the foundation. That, more than anything else, will help prevent foundation damage, as well as cracks in walls and ceilings. If water is standing in any area of the property or is running off the property too quickly, causing erosion, consult with a qualified landscaping professional to correct those problems. Standing water contributes to mosquito breeding, and mosquitoes bring the West Nile Virus.

The best type of plants to put next to your foundation would look those that in Figure 1. Not everyone likes an Arizona type of landscape, so just remember that vegetation—and the related topics of grading and drainage—typically is the biggest problem for our homes. A poor choice is the *Cyperus* shown in Figure 2, which likes a lot of water to do its best. Due to our climate, just about anything will grow with the appropriate amount of water, so finding problems on the exterior grounds related to or caused by water and vegetation is common. Choosing between a lush, tropical landscape (see Figure 3) and a more desert landscape (see **Error! Reference source not found.**), and the problems inherent to each, must be left to personal preference. However, I do point out possible water and vegetation problems for your consideration, and since San Diego, as defined by annual rainfall, is a desert (called “desert Mediterranean”), I recommend xeriscape landscaping, or xeriscaping—the use of low water-use plants such as cactus, succulents, and native plants, to help preserve water in our natural desert environment.

By choosing plants that are well matched to San Diego’s environment, along with other factors (soil type, pH, and climate), your landscape can be colorful, water-wise, and low maintenance. Thus, learning about a plant’s preferences and then matching those preferences to local conditions will greatly improve their performance, your happiness, and the envy of your neighbors (not that I’m trying to promote envy or jealousy, you understand). This is what is meant when garden experts recommend using “regionally appropriate” plants.



Figure 1. The best type of foundation landscaping.



Figure 2. *Cyperus* (wrong plant) in foundation crawl space accesses (wrong location).



Figure 3. A high water-use yard.

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