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Drought tolerant ideas and options to make the most of your water usage. See more inside.





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Water & Garden 2022



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Top: A drought tolerant landscape can attract certain types of critters — just like this orange praying mantis seen one afternoon. COURIER photos/Peter Weinberger

Left: The “Garden Lady” in Claremont COURIER publisher Peter Weinberger’s backyard watches over the citrus trees in the garden.

Cover photo:

A single rose blooms in a bush in the front yard of Claremont COURIER head of advertising Mary Rose’s home on Friday, September 16. COURIER photo/Andrew Alonzo

GROWING A CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT MT. SAN ANTONIO GARDENS

by Gardens Resident Bill Wells

With a campus spanning 31 acres and serving as home to over 900 trees, residents of Mt. San Antonio Gardens are diligently working to preserve the beautiful park-like setting for which we have become known, while also recognizing the need to adopt more sustainable efforts. In 2021, Gardens residents and staff formed a water conservation committee to examine ways to reduce water usage while maintaining the beauty of the campus. The initial goal was to reduce water usage at the Gardens by 15% by 2025 with an immediate focus on reducing the amount of water used for irrigation. If water use could be reduced by that much, the Gardens would achieve conservation goals and significant financial savings each year.

Earlier this year, the committee created and implemented a pilot project in collaboration with Bob Perry, Fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects

and a recognized local expert in water-conserving landscape design. The pilot project determined how much water could be saved in one area of campus by installing pressure regulators, reducing turf grass, refurbishing the existing irrigation system, replacing and repairing sprinkler heads, installing drip irrigation for shrubs, planting drought-resistant plants in areas exposed by the removal of turf, and spreading mulch over barren areas. To assist the Gardens’ ground maintenance crew in caring for our many heritage trees across campus in this time of severe water restriction, an “Adopt a Tree Program” was introduced. Volunteer tree adopters water trees using soaker hoses following set guidelines on how and when to water.

These efforts have resulted in a dramatic 50% drop in water usage based on initial data provided, even before taking into account

the severe water restrictions that have now been imposed. The ideas and methods that are working in the area of the pilot project are now being gradually implemented across campus. Future seminars on water conservation opportunities are also in the works.

Resident Bill Wells and his wife, Jane Park Wells, have called Mt. San Antonio Gardens, a local not-for-profit Life Care Community, their home for the past seven years. Bill, a member of the Gardens’ Conservation & Sustainability Committee and Chair of the Water Conservation Subcommittee, wrote this article with the input of fellow committee members and residents Sam Tanenbaum and Jan Bush. For more information about Mt. San Antonio Gardens, call us at 1-909-624-5061 or visit our website at msgardens.org.



Pictured: Mt. San Antonio Gardens pilot project area featuring water-conserving landscape design.



Claremont resident Deborah Kekone displays a somewhat tattered copy of the plan for the complete redo of her front yard. She and her husband David hired landscape architect Natural Earth to design and build a sustainable Japanese themed low-water garden. COURIER photo/Steven Felschundneff

Native, drought tolerant yards can be green too

by Steven Felschundneff

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Heading down Miramar Drive one can observe a microcosm of how Claremont residents are dealing with the ongoing drought.

Some people have drought tolerant landscapes that were planted years ago; others simply don't appear to care about current mandatory water restrictions, with lawns as green as ever.

Several homeowners are in the process of removing turf and planting native, water efficient flora, and one has a recently installed bright green artificial turf.

A growing number of yards, perhaps even the majority, are dry and brown as the summer sun saps any and all moisture the one-day-per-week watering schedule has left in the soil.

But if you've had it with that dead lawn, a number of local organizations and businesses would like to help you transform your yard into a beautiful, yet water efficient, Southern California paradise.

Not everybody wants, or even likes, a cactus garden, but a desert motif isn't your only option. Various plant species can provide a lush carpet that looks great without requiring the constant watering of turf.

Lauren Weintraub Stoebel, assistant director of visitor engagement, public relations and events at the California Botanic Garden, asked some of the experts in that institution's employ for a list of species that could replace a lawn while requiring less water. Their suggestions include the following:



Achillea, also known as yarrow, seen above in a more wild state, can be cut short to appear like a traditional grass lawn. Photo courtesy/California Botanic Garden

Carex varieties, also known as sedge, can take some traffic and can be mowed or "weed whacked." It's coarser in texture than typical lawns, but the sedge "lawn" at the Garden gets watered only about every other week, according to Weintraub Stoebel.

Phyla nodiflora grows low like grass except for stalks with flowers which can be removed if desired. The species doesn't require nearly as much water as a lawn but just how much water depends on planting location. Like carex, it can take low-to-moderate foot traffic.

Achillea (yarrow) is a great groundcover that looks sort of like a very low-growing, feathery fern. It's probably best in a bit of shade and will be lush and green if planted in just the right spot. In addition, fragaria, or wild strawberry, is similar to achillea with a slightly different look and similar water needs.

"These would both yield a low-growing, green lawn-like look, but are not suitable in areas where there is a lot of foot traffic," Weintraub Stoebel said.

Of course, there is no need to hire a landscape architect to achieve a beautiful and sustainable garden. For residents who wish to perform a do-it-yourself project, the California Botanic Garden's Grow Native Nursery offers a wide selection of California native plants, most of which require

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Hayden Webb, with Natural Earth landscaping company, and Deborah Kekone discuss the planned redesign of Kekone's front yard recently in Claremont. COURIER photo/Steven Felschundneff

modest irrigation. The nursery is closed for summer but will reopen with its annual fall plant sale on Saturday, October 15, from 8 to 10 a.m. for members and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. for the public. The updated plant list for the fall sale will be sent out early on Friday, October 14.

In the meantime, the Garden itself is a great place to identify plants that could ultimately become part of your sustainable garden. Or just drive some neighborhoods to identify the landscape look and plants that appeal to you.

The Claremont Garden Club is another great resource, with plenty of knowledgeable people who love to talk about plants. The club is hosting an event, "Tips for a healthy garden during extreme drought," on Wednesday, October 12 from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at Claremont United Church of Christ's Louise Roberts Room, 233 Harrison Ave.

Sustainable Claremont's Resource Guide includes "local organizations and businesses that specialize in water conservation, energy efficiency, and more sustainable management of our landscapes and natural resources." Sustainable Claremont is located in the Lenz Building at the California Botanic Garden, 1500 N College Ave. Hours are Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

If you have the means and are interested in hiring

someone to do the work, a number of local businesses will be happy to completely transform your yard, all the way from turf removal to finished product.

Claremont residents Deborah and David Kekone had been toying with the idea of removing the lawn in front of their 1950s era tract home for some time, but the water restrictions put the project in high gear. The couple, who are both designers, interviewed several landscape architects before settling on Natural Earth because the company's representative seemed to really grasp the ideas the couple had for the project.

The plan was to create a Japanese-inspired garden but with plants that are suited for our climate. The Kekones also wanted to create a space where neighbors could congregate. The design, which includes a series of geometric-shaped retaining walls that can also work as seating, will draw inspiration from the Huntington Botanical Gardens. The goal, according to Deborah Kekone, is to create a beautiful yet functional and usable front yard in which the family will enjoy spending time.

The project got off to a slow start, largely because the nut grass that made up their lawn proved extremely difficult to eradicate. And then there was the faulty water main that needed to be replaced. In the end they elected to dig portions of the yard 12 to 18 inches below the

old surface, to get rid of the grass completely, and to create places where rainwater could be captured.

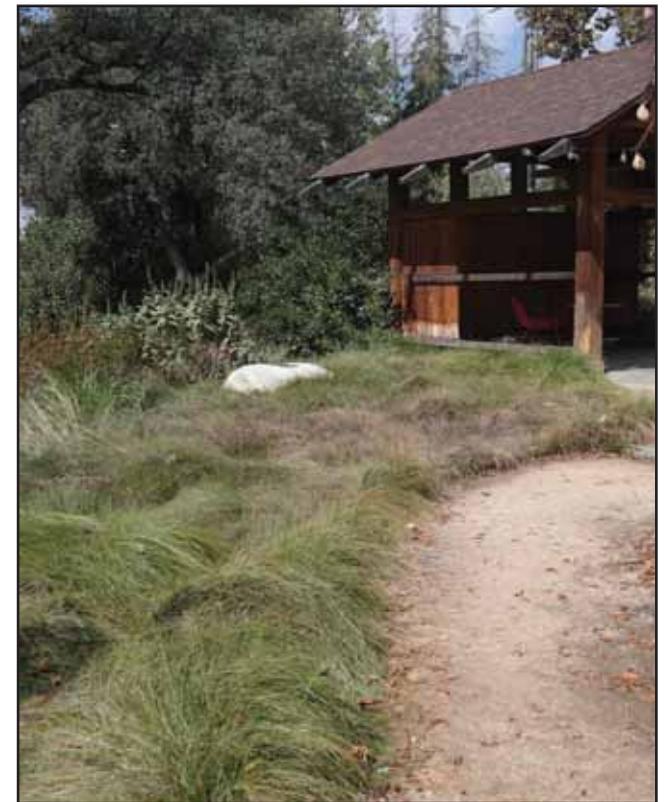
"Our number one goal in sustainable landscaping is to create areas where water can slow down, kind of percolate down to the ground," said Hayden Webb of Natural Earth. "But also create areas of interest so your eye is drawn to it. It's a huge ethos with our company, changing the way you feel about a landscape, and we do that through topography."

Although Kekone admits they have not actually selected the plant species yet, she knows what they don't want.

"I wanted to stay away from the sage, lavender and rosemary that you see everywhere," she said.

"We are going to be really selective with what we plant, and privacy is another thing I am mindful of. So, using a California native like a toyon, that's a really nice shrub that creates a little bit of privacy ... Manzanita can be used as a screen but it's also an architectural plant," Webb said.

Regardless of whether you do the work yourself or hire a pro, you can still qualify for a turf removal rebate from the Metropolitan Water District of \$2 per square foot of grass removed. To apply visit bewaterwise.com and click on the rebate tab to find the turf removal program.



This photo from the California Botanic Garden shows a variety of Carex, also known as sedge, which is a water wise alternative to maintaining a lawn. Photo courtesy/California Botanic Garden

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Water hacks: how have Claremont residents been conserving?

by Andrew Alonzo
aalonzo@claremont-courier.com

It's been just over 100 days since the Claremont City Council voted to affirm a level two water supply shortage.

The resulting restrictions were simple: residents were to cut their water usage by 20% in comparison with 2020 figures.

Thus, beginning June 1 Claremont residences with sprinkler systems could only water yards one day-a-week. Watering by hand and/or drip irrigation systems are still be allowed before 9 a.m. or after 5 p.m.

Residential properties Cal Fire determined to be in a severe fire hazard zone, and those in unincorporated areas of Claremont, are both exempt from the single day watering restriction, but still must reduce consumption by 20%.

Other restrictions are for everyone in



Sorrel Stielstra's and Chris Chinn's vegetable garden has gone fallow, partially due to ongoing water restrictions. COURIER photos/Andrew Alonzo

the city, including prohibiting hosing down driveways and walkways; mandating water features such as fountains only use recirculated water; rinsing cars only with recycled water, a pressure

washer, or a hose with a shutoff valve; and repairing all water leaks within 48 hours.

Sustainable Claremont Executive Director Stuart Wood recalled hearing

about the new restrictions.

"I think they probably caught most of us off guard," he said. "For a lot of us, it was seen as a step that should have been taken much sooner."

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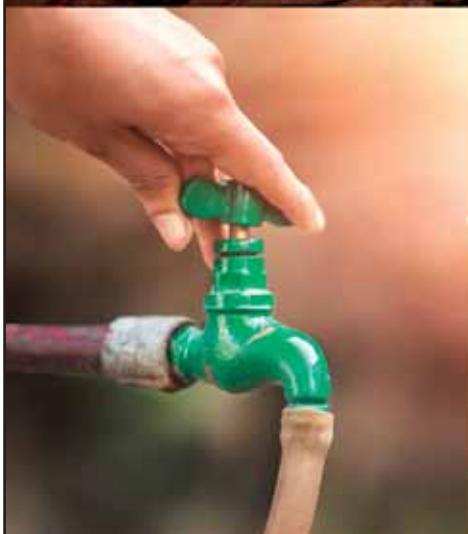
Drought Emergency 2022

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Based on state and regional conditions, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, our community's largest supplier of water to the region, voted on April 26 to declare an Emergency Water Shortage Condition and called for all water users within State Water Project reliant areas to immediately reduce non-essential uses of water to preserve limited water supplies for the remainder of the year. As retail agency members of the local wholesaler Three Valleys Municipal Water District, Golden State Water-Claremont and the city of LaVerne are reliant on State Water Project and implementing conservation measure to preserve this limited resource. The first step is moving to 1 day per week watering.

Check with your local water provider for specific watering restrictions and limitations.



Check out tips and resources on conservation at SaveOurWater.com and BeWaterWise.com

Wood lives in La Verne, but said his family of four is subject to the same restrictions facing Claremont. They've since become much more cognizant of water usage by limiting the time spent washing dishes, maximizing the size of laundry loads, and cutting down on time spent in the shower.

"We're all sort of climate and water conservation hypocrites and that's okay," Wood said. "We just have to sort of be aware of what we're being called to do and do our best. Just all the simple stuff that we all kind of know about. The best thing about water conservation is that it's not tricky, it's right there in front of you. You just have to be aware of it."

Not too long ago the family decided to cut off watering its landscaping completely, with the only exception being the massive pine trees surrounding the house.

"We cut the water to one day initially for a couple weeks, then it seemed kind of silly to even just do the one day because it had all sort of gone south by then," Wood said. "So we just cut the water completely."

Driving through Claremont, brown — or what Wood calls "crunchy grass" — seems to be the unpopular but obvious choice. Over the last week, the COURIER asked residents to share how they have been cutting back their water usage.

"Turning off the sprinklers and letting the front lawn go has worked to completely get us back to the needed minimum," wrote Sumita Pahwa on the Claremont Connects Facebook group. "Also, being careful about doing larger loads of laundry instead of multiple small loads, timing showers so everyone is not in there longer than six minutes, and of limiting flushing where there is no pressing need."

Claremont native Sorrel Stielstra wrote in an email that she and her husband Chris Chinn made the decision to let their six-bed garden go fallow over the last few months. In the past the garden produced tomatoes, lettuce, peppers, herbs and other seasonal vegetables, but when the COURIER viewed it on Saturday, September 17, it was anything but verdant.

"I realized that the amount of water wasn't worth the yield from the garden, so we let the plants die," Stielstra wrote.

The couple has employed hacks such as using "greywater," which refers to

the reuse of non-fecal wastewater from sinks, showers, baths, washing machines or dishwashers, for laundry and landscaping. They also have a recirculating pump to heat water before turning on the shower so it isn't wasted while waiting for the water to get warm, and they utilize lots of wood chips in their garden for deep mulch.

Claremont Connects member Summer Kaimalia said she too has been using greywater. "I've started using gray water from showers and dishwashing (even the water used for boiling pasta) ... My plants don't seem to mind at all," she wrote.

Claremont resident Laura J. Muna-Landa told the COURIER, "Each shower has a bucket and we capture the greywater or water that overshoots. On average, we capture three buckets a day (16-quart bucket)."

Stielstra recently installed a Flume water use sensor, which sends water use stats to her smartphone and can also detect leaks.

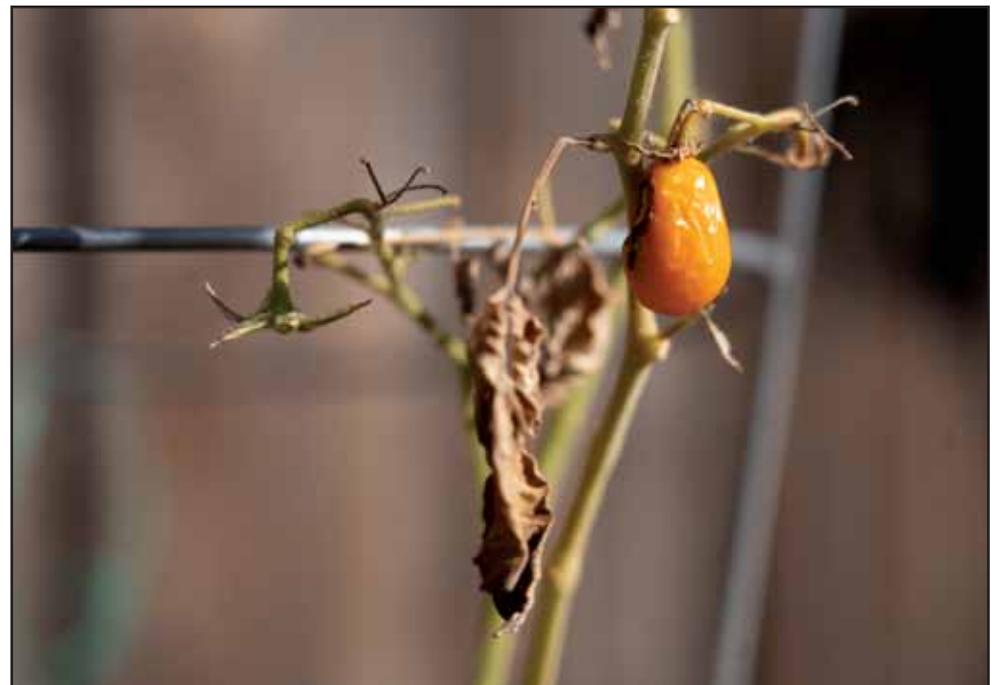
"These measures have helped us achieve the 20% Golden State Water-mandated reduced water use," Stielstra said. "So it would seem that there has been [monetary] savings as well!"

Since restrictions began, Wood and Sustainable Claremont have been doing more educational outreach, hosting informational programs and answering queries from folks looking to be more water wise. Email them at info@sustainableclaremont.org if you have a question.

On November 13, Sustainable Claremont will host a free water-wise community festival at California Botanic Garden. The event is designed to provide education and guidance on California native plants, water wise landscaping and more. Information is at sustainableclaremont.org/2022/09/14/waterwise-community-festival.

Other tips and resources are available at water.ca.gov/water-basics/conservation-tips. To view Claremont's current water restrictions, visit ci.claremont.ca.us/living/water/drought-information.

Claremont looks to be doing its part, but with the drought worsening, there is no end in sight to current restrictions. Metropolitan Water District indicated in July it will reevaluate the city's conservation efforts in September and determine whether further cutbacks are needed.



COURIER advertising director Mary Rose's lawn shows the impacts of recent water restrictions have allowed her front yard to brown over on Thursday, September 15.

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Char Miller, seen in the front yard of his home, is the W.M Keck Professor of Environmental Analysis and History at Pomona College. COURIER photo/Steven Felschundneff

Pomona professor: 'pay it forward' to solve state water woes

by Mick Rhodes
 editor@claremont-courier.com

In his spectacular new book, "Natural Consequences: Intimate Essays for a Planet in Peril," Char Miller explores our relationship with a changing climate here in Claremont, providing a fascinating backstory to a crisis unfolding in real time.

Among its six chapters of essays are thoughtful observations, historic explorations, criticism, and solutions to the city's and state's ever-increasing extremes in heat, flood, fire, and drought.

Miller is the W.M. Keck Professor of Environmental Analysis and History at Pomona College, where's he's taught for 15 years, and the author of more than 15 books and 40 essays. He has a particularly elegant take on Claremont's historic and recent water woes, from flood to drought.

Miller's overarching message is simple: keep it local. And for him, that means

Claremont.

"Do the work where you live, because that's where you live and that's what you know," he said. "But it means you have to know the place, and that's largely what this book is about, is how I have come to know Claremont."

For nearly 100 years, Los Angeles County has imported its water, largely from the Colorado River. But climate change and a century of diversion has reduced that waterway to historic low levels, like many others across the Western U.S. And as supplies recede, the price of importing the increasingly scarce resource goes up.

Claremont residents needn't be reminded of this certainty of supply and demand. Here Golden State Water Company controls the flow into swimming pools, out of faucets and sprinklers, and it enjoys the considerable spoils.

All that could change, Miller says.

"Now we have to think about the eco-

nomie costs of maintaining systems that move water hundreds of miles from their source to where it's going to be consumed."

At the time the L.A. Aqueduct was being developed in the early part of the 20th century — with the intent of channeling water from the eastern slopes of the Sierra Nevada to the city and the surrounding region — Claremont made a decision: through the guise of the Pomona Valley Protective Association, the city instead endeavored to maintain the natural alluvial fan that wrapped around San Antonio Canyon.

"So L.A. went to get imported water, and Claremont and the Chino Basin Water Conservation District, as it's now known, to our immediate east, started working on this effort to use the natural system to benefit that system and us," Miller told the COURIER.

The idea was not new; as hydrology engineers, other experts, and everyday

farmers were well aware, when water flowed through the alluvial fan, it would percolate into the aquifer below.

"This is really innovative work in the early part of the 20th century," Miller said. "And it's that locally conceived response that I would love us to both recognize — because it happened — but also to model many of our own works on."

Unfortunately, Claremont's forward thinking didn't last. Like the rest of Los Angeles County, the trajectory of its water policy was forever altered as a result of the devastating 1938 flood, which inundated portions of Claremont and much of Southern California with 30,000 cubic feet per second of water rushing out of San Antonio Canyon.

Intent on preventing a recurrence, over the ensuing years federal, state and local agencies constructed multiple dams — including San Antonio Dam north of Upland, completed in 1956, and Prado Dam

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in Chino Hills, which opened in 1941 — and turned the ancient L.A. River into a concrete channel.

As one might expect, housing was constructed on many of the alluvial fans, which had heretofore provided plentiful local groundwater for generations. All that concrete choked the natural aquifers underneath. Compounding the damage, new agricultural interests also set up shop and employed pesticides and other chemicals that, over time, leached into groundwater. And, well, here we are.

To be clear, Miller isn't advocating for the removal of San Antonio Dam.

"The larger point is that we have changed the cycle and made it much more difficult to percolate water into the aquifers beneath our feet," he said. "So we've got to get smarter about how we can infiltrate water back into those systems so that in fact, they serve as underground reservoirs for us. It's a lot cheaper than building a reservoir."

In a rare instance of good news about Claremont's water, the Pomona Valley Protective Association is still at it. The 112-year-old nonprofit, which maintains an office in Claremont, continues to capture and percolate rainwater in order to replenish the region's aquifers. "Through the capture and spreading of storm water, we replenish the area's aquifers and release water when rainfall creates groundwater levels that become too high," according to its website.

Miller envisions a multi-pronged approach to changing our relationship with

water, how we harvest it, and from where. It involves conservation on all fronts: eliminating water-hungry lawns in favor of naturally drought tolerant native plants; capturing runoff; utilizing low-flow technology; building more spreading grounds to replenish aquifers; and constructing water treatment plants to clean water extracted from aquifers that have been poisoned through agricultural means by a century of pesticides and other chemicals; and many other efforts.

Perhaps his most ambitious plan is to restock subterranean aquifers where the urban has overlaid the previously rural. Part of this would be convincing public and private entities to create more "bioswales," which divert and collect storm water runoff and allow it to percolate down into the underlying aquifer, rather than storm drains. Pomona College has several.

Corporate America's reason for being is profit. Yes, it 'twas ever thus, but when something as empirically sound as climate change becomes a political cudgel, perhaps we must recognize our societal zeitgeist has reached new heights of arrogance. In this environment, is it even possible to sway government and private water enterprise toward altruism?

"That's part of the problem, of course, but that's why I'm such a big fan of incentives: make it possible for big [agriculture] to make the move to more sustainable water management," Miller said. "So, if the dilemma for them is cash, then let's get them the money to make the tran-

sition," Miller said. "I'm totally fine with that, because [agriculture] consumes 80 percent of the water" in California. "If we could cut that back to 60 to 50 percent, all of a sudden the game changes, and the droughts that we imagine and experience are less severe at one level. That's a big win-win for them and it's a big win-win for us."

It may mean farmers grow different crops, and rethink products such as almonds, which require massive amounts of water and are primarily exported, Miller said.

"And I don't mean that other people in the world shouldn't eat almonds," he said, "but why should they eat our water? Because that's effectively what we're doing."

California real estate is among the most costly in the nation. Building treatment plants and spreading grounds, not to mention new equipment and training for farmers, would require billions in government investment. Assuming lawmakers are on board, where would the money come from?

California's "rainy-day fund is billions of dollars," Miller said, referencing the state's \$20.9 billion in Proposition 2 Budget Stabilization Act funds currently on the books. "Well, let's start giving out seed money for [agriculture] to help them make the transition in the same way that L.A. County has helped L.A. County make the transition by requiring, through codes, the implementation of

low-flow technologies in new household construction," Miller said.

Getting lawmakers on board with the long-term vision required — because the fruit from the labor of percolating water into aquifers takes decades to present itself — is also a daunting proposition. Even with these encumbrances, Miller believes the future must be in innovation and the familiar "three Rs" — reduce, reuse, recycle — and not in water importation.

"And that's why I really love the dairy farmers, the citrus growers, and the civic leaders back in the early part of the 20th century," he said. "They knew they were doing something for themselves to be sure, but that if you filled these alluvial fanned aquifers with water, and managed that process with a sense of stewardship, their grandchildren would benefit from this process."

"I love that sort of pay it forward notion that comes coupled with a kind of more responsibility to those that we actually bring into this world, that we're not going to leave it in a worse shape than we received."

Miller said he feels blessed to have grown up in a post-WWII America, where he reaped the benefits of sacrifices made two generations earlier.

"And I want to be able to make the same set of arguments for my grandkids, and for everybody's grandkids, whoever that inherits this work after we're gone."

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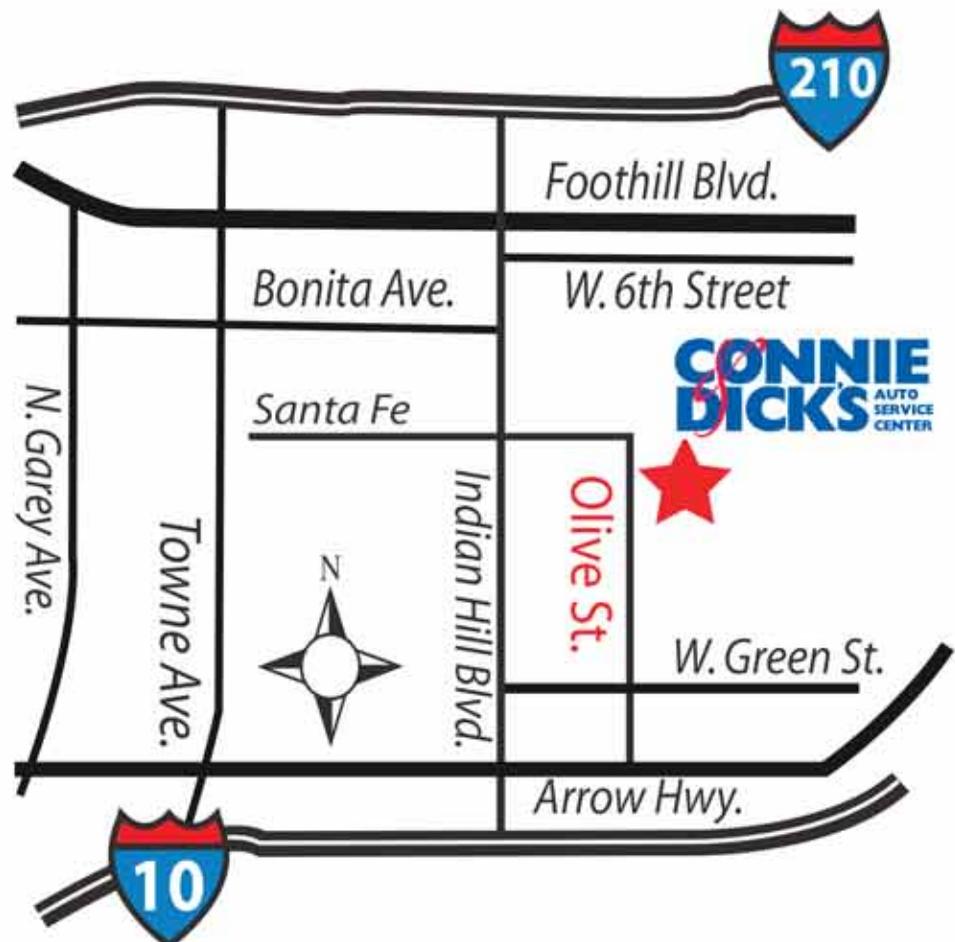
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Out with the drought: Farewell to our grassy front yard of 60 years

by Peter Weinberger
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I was so sure replacing our green lawn of 60-plus years was the right thing to do. Even though there are many fond memories growing up playing outside on our lawn, I was simply worn out trying to maintain grass that seemed to need water constantly. And over the past year, with rising temperatures becoming a common occurrence, it seemed impossible to keep up.

My neighbor had a beautiful front yard with a desert motif, and now that it was more mature, it was classy and colorful. Brown decomposed granite (DG) and rock were key to the design, replacing grass of any type. He also would not hesitate to remind me how much water (money) he was saving. That obviously got my attention.

Eventually, we ended up calling the very same landscaper he used, and started talking. After discussing design ideas and plant types, we eventually came up with a plan focused on drought tolerant plants and a drip irrigation system. Like our neighbors, sand and rock would be key components for the overall design.

It didn't take long to make the decision to remove the grass and make the jump to native California plants. They may not have spectacular blooms, but they do have quite interesting foliage. At least we wouldn't have our long-standing gopher problem any longer! Or so I thought.

Given we were still near the end of the pandemic when making this momentous decision, it would take months before work started. The front yard was finished just one week before the start



This succulent (a cultivated Crassulaceae) may not have pretty blooms like other flowering plants but can be quite colorful on its own. COURIER photo/Peter Weinberger

of severe water restrictions in Claremont.

Yes, it was very lucky timing, but I still had no idea if we could reduce our water usage by 35 to 40%. All I knew was the water bill seemed to be getting larger by the week, with summer totals now reaching \$400 to \$450 per month. But we had a secret weapon: a proper irrigation system.

For our grass, all watering was set on a timer using pop-up sprinklers. We kept an eye on their maintenance to avoid surprises when away from home (one broken sprinkler can waste enormous amounts of water). Even well maintained, this system still was not as efficient as we preferred. And when the temperature reached 100 degrees or higher, I would hand water to keep up with the heat. Our weather is changing, and we had to adjust and adapt.

Impact of change

Fast-forward to September, and we could not be more excited about our new landscaping. What made it easier for us was the landscaper, Jonescape (jonescape.us) took our ideas, added their own and delivered on what they promised. The underground water system works like a charm, making it obvious the water is going to the right place ... on the plants!

The use of rock also acts like a mulch, keeping those hated weeds from sprouting in all the wrong places. Speaking of out-of-control plants, we did have fountain grass added with the long furry stems. They are great at capturing light but also grow very quickly and can take over your garden. At this point, we are evaluating whether we want to keep them.

During the hot summer, we drip watered twice daily, then cut to once. We have noticed significant growth with most of our plants, although some of the very small ones have not been as

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active. The gray DG also sticks much more than you would think. It's compressed into the ground and watered during installation, thus keeping spread to a minimum. Although clearing leaves off it is more time consuming.

The bad news was our 20-year relationship with a gopher(s) continues even after all the grass was killed and dug up. They started showing up about six weeks after planting. Very resilient critters!

Water savings

The water savings from last year has been substantial and welcome news for our pocket-book and the drought. We are saving about 55%, enough to keep our water bill under \$180 during peak watering times. This is way more than anticipated but probably doesn't surprise some of our readers. Literally the only change we made was removing the front

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Right: The downside to installing sand is it makes it more difficult to clean up — especially with a large Oak tree hanging around shedding. Leaves can also get stuck in cactus branches when the wind blows in the afternoon. COURIER photo/Peter Weinberger



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lawn. That was expensive grass!

Finally, we were able to save \$3,600 via a rebate through the Metropolitan Water District's turf replacement program from SoCal WaterSmart (socialwatersmart.com). The rebate is largely based on the amount of lawn reduced, which for us was around 1,700 square feet. It's easy to sign up, but it takes about 10 weeks for the rebate to be paid.

Since my wife Betsy and I are not experienced gardeners, this route for a drought tolerant landscape worked for us. And with all the water restrictions that are most likely here to stay, it was something we had to do ... and will eventually pay for itself in water savings.

Right: This cactus' bright yellows match the gray DG. They are also quite prickly and can easily puncture through skin — although, they can handle just about any kind of severe weather.



This fountain grass will light up during the sunset and tends to grow rapidly. It's critical to make sure these plants are sterile before planting or else they can easily take over your yard. Winter trimming is important to expose new foliage and prevent uncontrolled growth. COURIER photos/Peter Weinberger

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Tips for drought-conscious gardening



By Melinda Myers | Special to the COURIER

Being a drought wise gardener doesn't mean you have to give up the beauty of your garden, but it does mean making some changes in plant selection, garden design and maintenance.

This will involve a few adjustments, but the benefits will be long lasting.

As you watch your water thirsty plants suffer and perhaps die from heat and water restrictions, start thinking about replacements. Current and future water restrictions make now a good time to rethink lawn areas.

Consider converting grassy paths to surfaces like mulch, permeable pavers, and gravel, which don't require water but allow rainfall to infiltrate the soil below. Replace traditional lawns with more drought tolerant lawn alternatives.

If you still have a lawn, mow it high. Tall grass forms deeper, more drought tolerant roots.

You can also fill voids or transition garden beds to native more drought tolerant plants. Many bloom, support pollinators and have subtle colored foliage and form, adding texture year round. Select those native to drier climates. Mediterranean plants and succulents are good options.

Start making these changes when temps cool off in mid-fall through early winter. New plants have smaller root systems and need additional water to become established, so planting when temperatures fall minimizes the water needed.

As you add new plants or re-design gardens, place plants with similar water needs together. This allows you to adjust irrigation zones and utilize hand watering so you apply only what each area needs.

Give your plants space to show off their beauty. Fewer plants in a garden also means less water needed.

Before placing new plants, take advantage of the opportunity to improve the soil. Mixing in compost and mulch will help it retain water longer, and healthy soil

promotes more resilient growth. Mulching also helps suppress weeds and keeps roots cooler during hot weather. Match the mulch to the plants you are growing: succulents prefer decomposed granite or gravel while others thrive with organic mulches like leaves or wood chips.

Water early in the morning to reduce evaporation. Don't rush to water plants wilting during mid-day. Wilting and curled leaves help plants reduce water loss. Wait to see if plants revive in the evening or early morning when temperatures are cooler and sunlight less intense. Then, if restrictions allow, water if needed.

Repair and update your irrigation system and invest in drip irrigation or soaker hoses that apply water directly to the soil, reducing evaporation.

Check with your local municipality to see if you are able to install a "laundry to landscape" graywater system. These systems use water from a washing machine to irrigate plantings.

Have your soil tested to find out what type and amount of fertilizer your plants need. You will save money and promote healthier, more drought tolerant growth with proper fertilization. Avoid high nitrogen, fast release fertilizers as they require more water. Consider using a low nitrogen slow release fertilizer that provides small amounts of nutrients over time, promoting balanced, more drought tolerant growth.

Remove weeds as they appear. These unwanted plants compete with your garden for water and nutrients. Some can attract or harbor insects and disease organisms that can attack your garden.

As gardeners, it's often hard to resist the lure of new, more colorful or unique varieties not suited to our growing conditions. Passing on those water thirsty plants and selecting those suited to our climate will result in a beautiful landscape that uses less water and requires less maintenance.

Melinda Myers is a gardening expert, television and radio host, author, columnist, and speaker. Find out more at melindamyers.com.

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