Garden SMARTER

Create a beautiful **STRESS-FREE** Santa Clarita Valley landscape **YEAR ROUND**







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Turn your turf space into a wildlife haven
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Vertical gardening brings salad days indoors
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TAKE THE FIRST STEP

Plant now for a ***vibrant, sustainable future***

SCV Neighbors, I'm so glad you're here! Thank you for your interest in learning more about making the move to water-wise landscaping. As SCV Water adapts to the far-reaching effects of drought and climate change, we are happy to provide these important expert tips and guidance, as well as rebates and resources. And if you've been thinking about making the switch, now is the perfect time.

Besides saving water today, you are laying the groundwork (literally!) for a more sustainable future for your yard, not to mention the bees, butterflies and birds looking for a place to flourish. Imagine your neighborhood—and all of Santa Clarita—as a beautiful, biologically diverse and water-wise community. Healthy shade trees line streets and yards are filled with vibrant plantings of shrubs, perennials, and low-water groundcovers.

It can happen, and it starts with you!

Matthew G. Stone General Manager SCV Water



Photo courtesy of SCV Water

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SOCIETY GARLIC (TULBAGHIA VIOLACEA)

WHITE LEADTREE (LEUCAENA LEUCOCEPHALA)

HEALTHY SOIL = HEALTHY PLANTS

Understanding ***microbes, clay soil and slopes***

By DEBBIE ARRINGTON

The key to a thriving garden and healthy plants? Start by realizing that the ground under your feet is teeming with life.

"Soil is a living thing; we absolutely need it," says soil expert Dr. Kathleen Treseder, an ecosystem ecologist and UC Irvine professor. "Life on Earth would not exist in the way we know it without soil."

Healthy soil is packed with microbes, the microorganisms vital for growing plants.

"Microbes that live in soil are the original recyclers," Treseder explains. "Anything that dies, they recycle. If it wasn't for microbes, we'd have piles and piles of dead material everywhere."

Instead, those busy microbes break down dead material into nutrients that plants can use. It's nature's way of feeding plants from the roots up.

Organic mulch (leaves, shredded bark, straw, wood chips, compost, etc.) and aged manure help feed microbes—and there are a lot to feed. One teaspoon of healthy topsoil can contain 1 billion microbes.

Microbes also need air and water. Clay soil, which has smaller particles than sandy soil, potentially has more room for air and water because the tiny clay particles have more total surface area per square foot.

"Clay soil retains water more than sandy soil, and water is very important for microbes," Treseder says.

Clay can become compacted (and particles stuck together), which leads to drainage issues. Water can't properly reach plant roots, so plants show signs of stress. When plants droop, people tend to add more water. Too much water and microbes can drown.

"The problem with clay soil is that if you don't add some type of organic material to break up the clay particles a little bit, the soil particles are so tight that water isn't available to the plants' roots," explains conservation specialist Kelly Takai of Green Media Creations.

Takai suggests adding compost and biochar (a charcoal-like substance) to aerate clay soil. "This will help add oxygen to the soil as well as material that will help break up the clay soil. Now you have soil that has water-holding potential along with oxygen and space for the roots to get water."

HOW TO COPE WITH SLOPES

"Hillsides and slopes are always areas that are hard to landscape," Takai says. "The steeper the slope, the harder it will be to plant and maintain. The best way is to terrace it or create safe pathways along the slope instead of just planting a lot of plants."

Once established, California native plants—especially trees and shrubs—can help stabilize a slope with deep roots. They help the soil, too.

"Planting native plants is very, very helpful to the microbial community," Treseder says. "They're already adapted to our climate, so they don't need as much maintenance from us as other plants."



DO THESE THREE THINGS NOW

What should homeowners do right now to help their landscapes? Conservation specialist Kelly Takai has these suggestions:

1. **REPLACE** the old conventional irrigation controller with a Smart Controller. "[It] automatically changes the run time of the [sprinkler] zone as we move from season to season," Takai says. Along with the controller, replace conventional spray nozzles with high-efficiency nozzles.
2. **REPLACE** overhead irrigation with drip irrigation in the planter beds. "In most cases, the plants are taller than the sprinklers and the water is blocked by the plants. It's also healthier for plants to keep their leaves dry and, by watering the surface of the soil instead of the foliage, we will reduce bacteria and fungal diseases."
3. **MULCH.** Not only does it conserve moisture, but mulch encourages plants to grow deeper roots. "The further down the roots reach, the more drought-tolerant the plant will be."







Native shrubs create an easy-care hillside landscape; a dry creek bed provides drainage and doubles as a path. Other slope solutions include terraces (above left) and low-water Mediterranean shrubs, perennials and ground cover (bottom left). **Photos courtesy of GardenSoft**

MAKING A WELL-INFORMED CHOICE

Secret to succulent success starts with ***finding the appropriate spot***

By DEBBIE ARRINGTON

Luis Isiordia knows the importance of putting the right plant in the right place. When it comes to succulents, that decision can be the difference between life and death.

While most cacti enjoy full sun, other succulents prefer some shade, especially during blazing summer afternoons. All succulents demand good drainage; if their roots stay soggy, they rot.

"It's a matter of education," Isiordia says. "You need to do a little research before you buy."

> *"It's a matter of education. You need to do a little research before you buy."*
>
> **Luis Isiordia**
> Co-owner, ISI Landscapes

A landscape designer, Isiordia co-owns ISI Landscapes, a 2-acre nursery devoted to succulents and other plants that do well in the Santa Clarita Valley. "Our best sellers are echeveria and agave," he says.

Cacti take a special kind of plant person—and the right kind of very dry growing environment. "Collectors love them, but a lot of people are still afraid of thorns," he says. "Some cacti look pretty crazy."

Many succulents and cacti thrive in Santa Clarita Valley; it's their kind of place.

"You want to grow plants that are appropriate to your climate," Isiordia says. That means not only when rainfall is "normal," but during drought as well.

His plants are well suited to local weather and growing conditions because they've lived here all their lives.

"They're acclimated," he explains. "Most plants [purchased from big box stores] come from San Diego County or greenhouses; they aren't used to our growing conditions. And if you plant them in the middle of summer, you will have a very low success rate."

Often, shoppers will buy a plant on a whim or because they think it looks appealing. "But they need to know where they're going to plant it first," warns Isiordia. "What conditions will it have in your landscape? Is it shade or full sun? How much water will it get?

"About three-fifths of all succulents require some shade," he explains. "They like the east or north side of the house but also can be under a tree or in a pot on the patio. Cactus can take more sun, no problem."

Once established, succulents need only limited water. "In the winter, if it's raining [normally], they can go a month with no irrigation," he says. "In the summer, irrigate every other week. If in pots, water no more than once a week."

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Isiordia offers this advice:

- Choose the right species for where you want that plant to grow. Do some research before you buy.
- Plant at the right time of year; for most plants, that's early spring or fall.
- Start with healthy plants; larger is better for perennials, succulents, shrubs and trees.
- Provide protection. New transplants need some TLC, including some temporary shade or supports.



Luis Isiordia, co-owner of ISI Landscapes, specializes in succulents, cacti and other water-wise plants. **Photos by Salvador Ochoa**



CHECK FOR SOIL MOISTURE

- Before irrigating, check the soil to see if your landscape really needs it. Use a moisture meter or long-handled screwdriver; if you can push the screwdriver 6 inches or more into the soil, wait on watering.
- Still unsure about soil moisture? Feel it for yourself: Take a trowel, dig down 6 inches and grab a small handful of soil. If it clumps in your hand, the soil has enough moisture. If it crumbles and dirt falls through your fingers, it's time to water.

BENEFITS OF GOING NATIVE

Transition from grass to native plants ***saves water, helps wildlife***

By DEBBIE ARRINGTON

Ready to ditch thirsty turf? But what do you plant instead? Consider incorporating California native plants into your water-efficient landscape.

"What makes native plants ideal [for local landscapes] is that they evolved here in Southern California," explains Evan Meyer, executive director of the Theodore Payne Foundation for Wild Flowers and Native Plants, which grows hundreds of varieties at its Sun Valley garden center. "They're adapted to our climate and seasonal rains."

That also means these tough and easy-care natives need less coddling (and water) than plants that struggle in Santa Clarita Valley's summer heat. "It's a matter of putting the right plant in the right place," Meyer says. "You need plants that can put up with a lot of sun. Plants from the California desert—cacti, agave, yucca—also do well here in addition to shrubland plants such as sage."

Native plants need a chance to "get established"—grow deep roots. That allows them to get through dry summer months with less irrigation. "You need to plant natives in season, November through April," Meyer says. "Otherwise, you need to hand water them through the summer. Start simple; pick a few plants to try. Don't be afraid to ask for advice [from experts]."

Transitioning turf to native plants gives native wildlife a chance to survive, too. "Cities are not just for humans," Meyer notes. "A native garden is always buzzing with birds and insects."

Biology professor Jeannie Chari and her students at College of the Canyons use native plants as a way to attract native wildlife to campus to study biodiversity. Turf landscaping was transformed into a native plant habitat. "You will see native plants distributed throughout our campus including healthy patches of California buckwheat, toyon (Christmas berry), oaks, sycamores, palos verdes and Matilija poppies," says Chari, coordinator of COC's Biodiversity Initiative.

Replacing turf with native plants fosters a more stable ecosystem, says Chari. "Plants native to California have evolved with the birds and insects native to California, so they rely heavily on one another."

Chari's team experimented with various plant species to see what grew best while also maintaining a beautiful campus landscape.

"There are many attractive plants that are native to California and are able to grow well in Santa Clarita specifically," she says. Among her favorites: toyon, desert marigolds, milkweed, showy penstemon, apricot mallow and California fuchsia.

After the switch to natives, students saw many more birds, butterflies, bees and other beneficial insects—which was exciting, Chari says. "The neatest thing about the transition is that it is so fun to watch."



Evan Meyer, executive director of the Theodore Payne Foundation, invites local residents to learn more about native plants at the foundation's nursery and demonstration gardens. **Photos by Salvador Ochoa**



PASEO RANCHO LILAC VERBENA (VERBENA LILACINA)



WHITE SAGE* (SALVIA APIANA) *See pg. 8



MATILIJA POPPY (ROMNEYA COULTERI)

SHEET MULCHING: HOW TO MAKE 'SOIL LASAGNA'

Nicknamed "soil lasagna" due to its layered approach, sheet mulching is a no-dig way to convert turf and other flat landscape areas into healthy garden space. This method of horizontal composting feeds the soil while smothering the grass and weed seed. Plant right through the layers—no tilling necessary. In Santa Clarita Valley, sheet mulching can be started any time, but takes four months or more to do its job. Tackle one small space—or do the whole lawn.

SCV Water recommends the following SMART practices for using sheet mulching to remove grass and amend soil:

You will need: newspapers, cardboard, carbon sources (such as wood chips, dried leaves, pine needles, straw) and nitrogen sources (such as steer manure, compost, fresh grass clippings, used coffee grounds, alfalfa pellets, vegetable scraps). Do not sheet mulch with landscape cloth.

1. **WATER** existing landscape the night before.
2. **MOW** or scalp grass or other vegetation down to the lowest possible level. Leave clippings to provide food for the decomposers (such as worms).

Do not turn the soil, but rather create small holes with a pitchfork or spade if the ground is compact. Turning disrupts soil ecology.

3. **COVER** the ground with four to six overlapping layers of newspaper or cardboard. Wet the newspaper or cardboard thoroughly.
4. **COVER** with a thin layer of nitrogen source(s).
5. **COVER** with about 1/4-inch thick layer of newspaper, overlapping the edges. Wet thoroughly.
6. **ADD** another layer of nitrogen compost.
7. **ADD** a layer of cardboard on top. Wet thoroughly.
8. **ADD** a layer of carbon source, such as wood chip mulch, 3 to 6 inches deep.

Water the sheet mulched area once a week (if you do not experience rain).

For more tips, see the California Native Plant Society's Sheet Mulching Information: https://bit.ly/3CfYVvV.

NEED A NEW TREE?

Consider these expert recommendations:



PALO VERDE (PARKINSONIA): Unique small tree with feathery foliage and green trunk



STRAWBERRY TREE (ARBUTUS UNEDO 'MARINA'): Evergreen small tree with clusters of white flowers and red berries



DESERT WILLOW (CHILOPSIS LINEARIS): Deciduous small tree bears clusters of big pink or burgundy flowers



CHINESE PISTACHE (PISTACIA CHINENSIS): Medium-sized drought tolerant tree with dazzling autumn foliage

TREES NEED SOME TLC

How to protect your ***MVPs: Most Valuable Plants***

By DEBBIE ARRINGTON

Trees represent both time and money; they take years to grow and are costly to replace. Our landscapes' most valuable assets, trees are our most expensive plants—and most at risk during drought.

"We are seeing trees suffer like during the last drought [a decade ago]," says Amanda Begley, watershed coordinator for the Safe Clean Water program. "Trees are not subject to water use restrictions, but people stop watering their lawns and there are ramifications—trees get ignored. They're not getting the water they need, and people have no idea why."

It's because many suburban trees get their moisture from surrounding lawn irrigation. Due to prolonged lack of rain, there's less overall water in the soil, too.

"It's a one-two punch," Begley adds. "And a tricky situation."

When you lose trees, you lose shade—and that makes everything hotter and drier.

Sycamores and other riparian tree species have been showing signs of drought stress—die back, leaf drop, scorched leaves, cracked bark or lack of vigor. Also suffering are alders, birches, Japanese maples and magnolias.

"Trees that are on south- and west-facing slopes have also shown more symptoms of water stress, as well as those trees that are located in very windy locations," notes Valerie Ferchaw, Urban Forestry administrator for the City of Santa Clarita.

Weakened by lack of water, trees are more susceptible to pests and disease, she notes. Visible insect damage may be another sign of stress.

The best way to protect your trees from water stress is to give them some regular TLC.

"Water deeply and thoroughly," says certified arborist John Windsor of Green Thumb Nurseries. "Five minutes of water [may] not penetrate deeply enough to water the roots of a tree."

Ferchaw agrees: "The best way to water a tree is to provide less frequent, deep applications versus frequent, shallow applications. The use of drip/soaker hoses within the drip-line of a tree is the best way to optimize water applications."

The addition of an organic mulch on top of the soil around the trees also helps to hold in water. Spread organic mulch (wood chips, shredded bark, leaves, straw, etc.—not rocks or gravel) over the tree's root zone—3 to 4 inches from the trunk to the edge of its leaf canopy, the drip-line. (Don't let mulch mound around the trunk; it can promote crown rot or other disease.) Besides retaining moisture, that mulch will help reduce competition from weeds or other plants. Then, give trees supplemental irrigation as needed.

TRAIN YOUR TREE TO GROW DEEP ROOTS

Slow watering can help your tree develop strong, deep roots as well as survive drought. Older trees benefit from a soaker hose. For young trees, use the bucket method: Drill a 1/8-inch hole on the side of a 5-gallon bucket an inch from the bottom. Place duct tape over the hole. Fill the bucket with water and place it near the trunk of a very young tree (under 1 year old) or along the tree's drip-line, the outer edge of its root zone. Remove the tape and allow the water to trickle down.

AGE OF TREE	FREQUENCY	AMOUNT EACH TIME
Up to 1 year	2-3 times a week	1 bucket (5 gallons)
2 years	Once a week	2 buckets (10 gallons)
3 years	Every other week	3 buckets (15 gallons)
Over 3 years	Deep water monthly	Use soaker hose for one hour along drip-line

TIPS TO HELP TREES

- **MOST TREES REQUIRE EXTRA IRRIGATION DURING A DROUGHT.** Use a 5-gallon bucket or soaker hose to give trees additional water where they need it–along the drip-line, the furthest reach of its branches. The drip-line is also the edge of a tree's root zone.
- **MULCH WILL HELP YOUR TREES KEEP THAT MOISTURE LONGER.** Apply 2 to 4 inches of organic mulch (wood chips, bark, leaves, etc.) out to the tree's drip-line. To avoid crown rot, leave 6 inches of space around the trunk; don't let mulch mound like a volcano.



Master gardener Barbara Dallis teaches first graders how to plant seeds at Mitchell Elementary School. **Photos by Salvador Ochoa**

GROWING FOOD & KNOWLEDGE

School garden program ***teaches first graders*** valuable lessons

By DEBBIE ARRINGTON

Planting seeds can lead to growth. That's true for vegetables—and children.

"Gardening takes patience," says Barbara Dallis, a Los Angeles County master gardener, who teaches gardening to first graders at Mitchell Elementary School in Santa Clarita. That's one of the first lessons the student gardeners learn and it's a skill that will be useful throughout their lives.

> *"The children all love it. Every week, we hear, 'We had so much fun!' "*
>
> **Barbara Dallis**
> Los Angeles County master gardener and school garden mentor

Dallis and fellow master gardener Rose Scordino lead the first graders through hands-on experience with growing food and flowers. In the school's garden, the kids plant seeds, then watch the seeds' gradual development from little sprouts to something for lunch—or a gift for their teachers, who also provide support.

"The children all love it," Dallis says of the garden program. "Every week, we hear, 'We had so much fun!'"

This winter's garden includes lettuce, radishes, beets, carrots, kohlrabi, peas and chives. Sweet peas climb the garden's fence.

"The kids love them," Dallis says of the sweet peas. "They give teachers flowers when they bloom."

Attracting butterflies and bees, a butterfly garden features milkweed for monarchs plus roses, lantana and butterfly bushes providing living lessons in ecology.

As they get their hands dirty, kids soak up knowledge about where food comes from. Plants need sun, nutrients and water to grow. Healthy soil produces healthy plants—and more food.

"The first time they pull up a radish or a carrot, they're so excited," Dallis says. "At the end of the season, we have a big harvest salad with all sorts of vegetables they grew. I have not seen a child ever turn down that salad."

The children also learn important lessons about water. The garden uses mulch and drip irrigation to stretch every drop.

"We talk about conservation from the beginning," Dallis says. "They all turn off the faucet when they brush their teeth. Every one of them knows we're in a drought."

During the summer, the garden's irrigation was turned off by the school to save water during drought cutbacks. When the students returned in the fall, the rose bushes looked "very sad," Dallis recalls. With some deep watering, "the roses came back beautifully and started blooming again. The kids were so proud—they saved the roses!"

EASIEST FOOD PLANTS TO GROW

Beginning gardeners of all ages can find success with these homegrown crops that can be planted in pots, the ground or raised beds:

- **TOMATOES:** Start with seedlings; kid-friendly cherry tomato varieties are easiest.
- **CUCUMBERS:** Grow vines on a trellis.
- **LETTUCE:** Choose loose-leaf varieties; harvest side leaves as needed.
- **RADISHES:** From seed, they're fast, fun and crunchy.

NOT TOO THIRSTY

Most food crops will take as much water as they can get, but some will still produce—and even thrive—with less irrigation. Here are some examples:

- **TOMATOES:** One large tomato plant uses the same amount of weekly water as 1 square foot of lawn—about 5 gallons a week. Tomato plants also can take summer heat. Plant seedlings deep and water weekly to encourage strong roots.
- **LETTUCE:** Stick to loose leaf varieties and grow in fall, winter and spring. Mulch helps retain moisture around shallow roots.
- **ARUGULA:** Like lettuce, Italian greens do well in Santa Clarita Valley, even during dry winters.
- **ONIONS AND GARLIC:** They're bulbs; they have their own built-in resources regardless of rainfall.
- **HERBS:** Oregano, rosemary, lavender, lemon verbena and other aromatic herbs naturally love our Mediterranean climate.
- **POMEGRANATES:** Actually a large shrub, this Mediterranean favorite can survive years of severe drought, then bounce back quickly with renewed irrigation.
- **OLIVES:** This ancient crop also offers great drought tolerance. Trees can live generations.
- **FIGS:** Another Mediterranean fruit, figs love California weather with little care; water deeply once a week.
- **GRAPES:** This California favorite prefers our hot, dry summers. New varieties are more disease resistant.









Make room for **native wildlife**

Besides providing you and your family outdoor space to recreate, your landscape can provide food and habitat to native wildlife such as birds, bees and butterflies. Their favorite choices? Native plants. Many California native plants grow extremely well in the Santa Clarita Valley while supporting local wildlife. Here are some suggestions from experts Evan Meyer and Erin Johnson at the Theodore Payne Foundation:



COASTAL LIVE OAK
(QUERCUS AGRIFOLIA)
Large tree; 25 to 80 feet tall
"It's our iconic oak of Southern California and a big beautiful shade tree." –E.M.



CALIFORNIA POPPY
(ESCHSCHOLZIA CALIFORNICA)
Annual or perennial flower
"For that burst of color in the spring, everybody has to have some poppies."–E.J.



WESTERN REDBUD
(CERCIS OCCIDENTALIS)
Shrub or small tree; under 15 feet tall
"Great color in early spring and pretty heart-shaped leaves."–E.J.



LEMONADE BERRY
(RHUS INTEGRIFOLIA)
Shrub; 3 to 20 feet tall
"An incredible plant; very fast growing and takes pruning very well; evergreen leaves and extremely drought tolerant." –E.J.



TOYON
(HETEROMELES ARBUTIFOLIA)
Shrub; 6 to 30 feet tall
"This big, standard shrub can frame your garden. It has beautiful red berries in time for the holidays." –E.M.



CALIFORNIA FUCHSIA
(EPILOBIUM CANUM)
Perennial; under 2 feet tall
"Those flowers are hummingbird magnets."–E.J.



PALMER'S INDIAN MALLOW
(ABUTILON PALMERI)
Perennial bush; 3 to 8 feet tall
"Gorgeous velvety leaves with beautiful yellow flowers—but extremely tough and can be shaped! It attracts all sorts of bees and butterflies."–E.M.



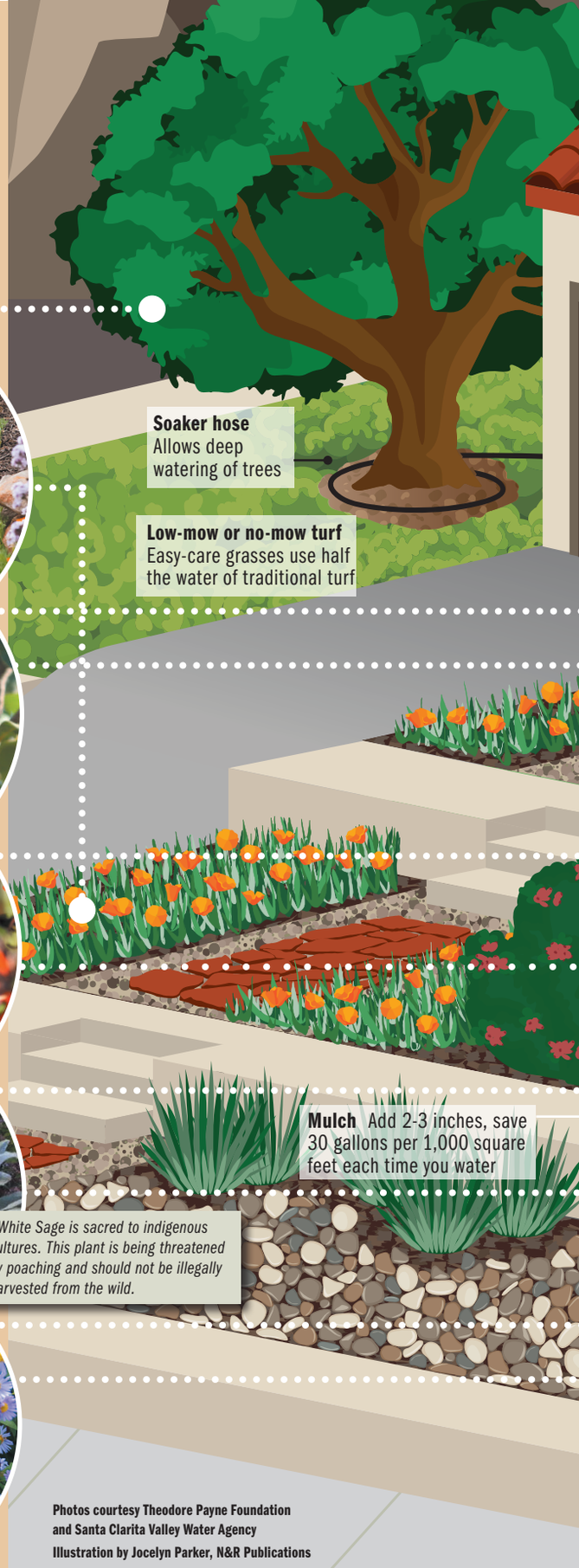
WHITE SAGE*
(SALVIA APIANA)
Shrub; 3 to 5 feet tall
"Silvery foliage and aromatic smell with beautiful tall flower spikes. Bees love the flowers, birds feed on the seeds."–E.M.



CALIFORNIA BUCKWHEAT
(ERIOGONUM FASCICULATUM)
Perennial; can be groundcover or shrub
"This is the workhorse of pollinator plants. Very durable; it can take hardpan and very little water."–E.M.

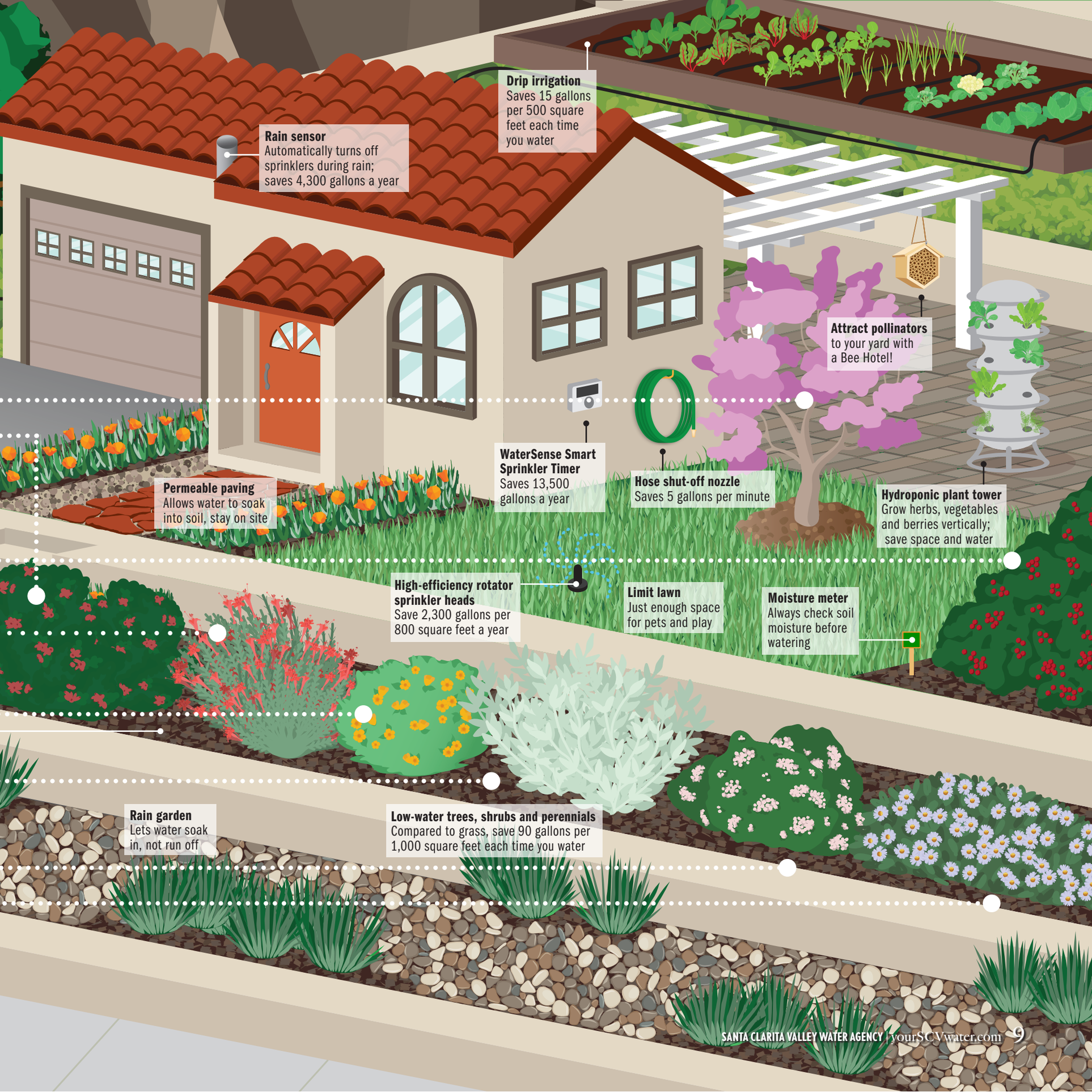


CALIFORNIA ASTER
(SYMPHYOTRICHUM CHILENSE)
Low-growing perennial groundcover
"Favorite for butterflies; silvery foliage with cute purple flowers; versatile and tough."–E.J.



*White Sage is sacred to indigenous cultures. This plant is being threatened by poaching and should not be illegally harvested from the wild.

Photos courtesy Theodore Payne Foundation and Santa Clarita Valley Water Agency
Illustration by Jocelyn Parker, N&R Publications


Drip irrigation
Saves 15 gallons per 500 square feet each time you water
Rain sensor
Automatically turns off sprinklers during rain; saves 4,300 gallons a year
Attract pollinators
to your yard with a Bee Hotel!
WaterSense Smart Sprinkler Timer
Saves 13,500 gallons a year
Hose shut-off nozzle
Saves 5 gallons per minute
Hydroponic plant tower
Grow herbs, vegetables and berries vertically; save space and water
Permeable paving
Allows water to soak into soil, stay on site
High-efficiency rotator sprinkler heads
Save 2,300 gallons per 800 square feet a year
Limit lawn
Just enough space for pets and play
Moisture meter
Always check soil moisture before watering
Rain garden
Lets water soak in, not run off
Low-water trees, shrubs and perennials
Compared to grass, save 90 gallons per 1,000 square feet each time you water



SALAD DAYS WITH LESS WATER AND WORK

A vertical garden system can grow 30 plants ***on as little as 10 gallons a month***

By DEBBIE ARRINGTON

Matt Dickens wanted to grow his own lettuce and other salad greens, but the heat of Santa Clarita summer quickly caused his plants to go to seed or turned leaves bitter.

His solution? Grow up—indoors. A vertical planting system allows Dickens to grow 30 heads of lettuce or other vegetables and herbs at once under lights.

"It looks really futuristic, sort of like a space ship," says Dickens, sustainability manager with Santa Clarita Valley Water. "It provides indoor plant aesthetics, too. It sounds like a fountain."

Besides producing delicious leafy vegetables year round, the vertical system is both space saving and water efficient. Taking less than 8 square feet of floor space, it occupies a corner of his kitchen. A pump recirculates water every 15 minutes, keeping roots moist.

"I can grow 30 plants on only 10 gallons a month," Dickens says. "It's so easy to maintain."

It's fast, too; lettuce takes six to eight weeks to fully mature. Adds Dickens, "What's really cool, I can pick a leaf or two for a sandwich any time—it's right there in the kitchen."

Besides lettuce and salad greens, Dickens also grows basil, thyme, oregano and cilantro.

Dickens' green column is an example of how container gardening can solve a wide range of gardening issues, from lack of growing space (or no actual dirt) to too much sun or shade. Containers allow gardeners to create the perfect growing medium and move it around to find the perfect space.

In this case, a container garden also provides easy-care efficiency. Plants grow in a foam-like soil substitute. Once a week, the column needs 2 tablespoons of nutrients added to the water. Dickens changes the water every three weeks.

> *"It's so effective. This system turns anybody into a gardener."*
>
> **Matt Dickens**
> Sustainability manager, Santa Clarita Valley Water, on his vertical garden

Because it's indoors, the vertical garden has few if any pest problems; bugs don't get a chance to get near the plants. On a timer, the LED lights offer just the right amount of light.

"I really, really enjoy the look of it and the benefits," Dickens says. "It's so effective. This system turns anybody into a gardener."

Matt Dickens can grow salad makings and herbs year round with his indoor, water-efficient vertical garden. **Photo by Salvador Ochoa**

WATER-WISE TIPS FOR CONTAINER GARDENING

No matter what kind of pot you choose, these ideas will make for happier plants:

- **Provide drainage.** Make sure there's a hole in the bottom of the container so excess water can drain.
- **Don't cover the hole.** For succulents, put a layer of gravel in the bottom of the pot before adding sandy potting soil designed specifically for succulents. For other plants, fill the entire container with potting soil so the planting medium can wick water out of the pot's saucer.
- **Remove saucers in winter.** Otherwise, rain may pool and rot roots.
- **Prevent hot pot feet**. In summer, place wood or cardboard under pots' saucers on concrete or other hardscape.
- **Line dark-colored pots with newsprint.** Newspaper insulates roots from heat absorbed by the pot.
- **Water slowly.** The drier the potting soil, the slower it absorbs water. A blast from a garden hose will run down the sides of the pot instead of soaking into soil and reaching the roots.
- **Monitor moisture daily.** Plants prefer their roots to be kept just right–not too wet or too dry. Use a moisture meter or feel the soil with your fingers.
- **Fertilize sparingly.** Too much plant food spurs rapid growth, which increases water needs.

BE PREPARED FOR FIRE DANGER

Your landscape can ***help protect your home***

By DEBBIE ARRINGTON

We live in wildfire country. Even in suburban neighborhoods, windblown embers can threaten homes. That danger is intensified for houses built close to where development and wildland meet, known as the Wildland Urban Interface.

A properly designed and maintained landscape can help protect your home and improve its survivability.

California law will soon have new requirements for landscaping and vegetation management in the WUI/fire hazard severity zones.

"In the past, there was a tendency to focus solely on brush clearance," explains Robert Walton of Los Angeles County Fire Department's Fuel Modification Unit. "It is equally important to emphasize home hardening [structural improvements that lessen the chance of structure ignition] in addition to landscape maintenance for defensible space."

It's not just the flames but the embers, which can travel up to 5 miles away from an active wildfire. Windblown embers generated during wildfires are the single biggest hazard wildfires pose to homes, says the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety.

Regular maintenance is very important and should be performed year round, especially on and immediately surrounding your structure. Don't let leaves or needles accumulate on your roof or in rain gutters. Trim trees away from structures so they don't overhang. Don't let vines climb up walls or woody shrubs grow below windows, eaves, decks, etc. Create an ember-resistant buffer 5 feet from structures by eliminating all flammable materials.

Traditional landscaping with closely packed plants, dense hedges or tall shrubs under trees can create paths for fire to spread quickly. Instead, surround your home with Defensible Space.



Erin Johnson of the Theodore Payne Foundation suggests planting fire-resistant native shrubs such as toyon. **Photo by Salvador Ochoa**

Defensible Space is achieved through a well-designed, well-maintained landscape and a properly hardened home. These practices provide a buffer between structures and the Wildland Urban Interface. Defensible Space can lessen the intensity of fire close to structures, providing a safe space for firefighters to defend the building.

"All plants can burn provided conditions are favorable," says Walton. "Instead, focus on breaking up both vertical and horizontal continuity of plants, what we call fuel ladders. Ideal plants are those that are high in moisture content, produce little litter, low in volatile resins [or] pitch, grow slowly and mature to sizes in scale with the properties in which they are planted."

Erin Johnson of the Theodore Payne Foundation has seen the dangers of wildfire firsthand. The 2017 La Tuna Fire came right up to the boundaries of the foundation's Sun Valley property. "It was very, very scary," she says.

The foundation now has a fire-management demonstration garden with suggested plants, says Johnson. "It gives people a sense of grouping of plants and the kind of plants to use. There's no such thing as a fireproof plant, but there are plants with characteristics that are more resistant to catching fire."



READY! SET! GO!

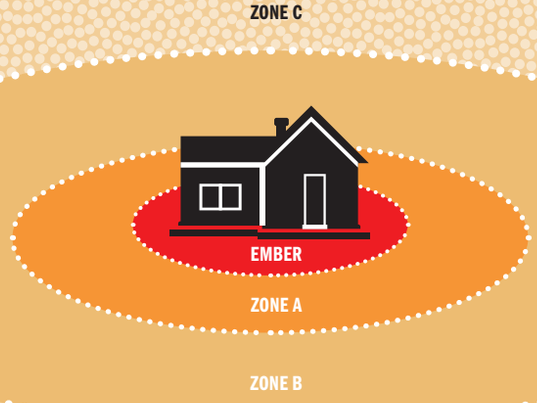
Download a copy of "Ready! Set! Go! Your Personal Wildfire Action Plan." It includes tips on how to harden your home and create Defensible Space.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT CAL FIRE'S DEFENSIBLE SPACE

PROTECT YOUR HOME

Help protect your home from wildfire by creating Defensible Space. Think of the area around your home and other structures as zones and plant accordingly:

- **Ember/Ignition Resistant Zone** *(0 to 5 feet from structures):* Nothing combustible—no plants, no organic mulch, no patio furniture or stacked wood. Surround buildings with gravel, rock or hardscape.
- **Zone A** *(5 to 30 feet):* Low-growing (under 3 feet tall), well-spaced herbaceous or succulent plants. No hedges. Use woody plants sparingly.
- **Zone B** *(30 to 100 feet):* Keep plants well spaced including trees; canopies should not touch. Avoid creating "fuel ladders" where flames can climb; no large shrubs under trees.
- **Zone C** *(100 to 200 feet):* Reduce brush or other fire hazards. Keep landscape thinned and maintained, but not denuded.



NEW IDEAS FOR PLAY SPACE

Turf alternatives and groundcovers can ***replace traditional grass***

by DEBBIE ARRINGTON

If the only time you walk on your lawn is to mow it, maybe it's time to grow something else.

"The vast majority of turf grass in Southern California is used as an ornamental groundcover," explains garden educator Tim Wheeler, owner and head instructor of The Wheeler Company. "Besides the fact that traditional grass uses about 50% more water than alternative groundcovers, it also requires a lot more maintenance such as weekly mowing."

Turf grass has its place, specifically high-use areas. Kids and pets need turf. So do public parks.

"We've done a lot of conversion where we can, where it makes sense," says Bryan Peck, City of Santa Clarita's parks administrator.

Out of Santa Clarita's 450 total acres of park space (including parking), about 100 acres are still mowed, Peck says. Most of that remaining turf is Bermudagrass.

"Bermudagrass is a water-saving, tough turf," Peck says. "It uses a lot less water [than traditional bluegrass]."

Santa Clarita Parks plant an improved Bermudagrass variety that's grown from seed. It's less invasive than common Bermudagrass and stays green longer. As a "warm season" grass, Bermudagrass goes dormant (stops growing) in winter, turning brown after the first frost. Hybrids start growing again as soon as daytime temperatures start to warm.

Helping a low-water lawn look its best starts at its roots, Peck notes. His department did "extreme soil work" before reseeding park turf. That included adding nutrients to support root growth and organic material to improve drainage.

> *"Getting rid of ornamental lawn that doesn't get used…is one of the best ways to reduce water use in the landscape."*
>
> **Tim Wheeler**
> Garden educator, The Wheeler Company

Besides hybrid Bermudagrass, Zoysia and St. Augustine are water-saving warm season grasses that can hold up to play and pets. St. Augustine is more shade tolerant and grows well under trees.

Lawn alternatives can be divided into two groups—"turf substitutes" that look and act like grass and low-growing ornamental groundcovers, notes Wheeler. Turf substitutes tolerate light foot traffic; ornamentals do not.

"Turf substitutes have become a focus of the nursery industry and it is working to develop more alternatives for the consumer," he says. Four that are finding a lot of success in Southern California: Kurapia (Lippia nodiflora), California Native Lippia (Phyla nodiflora), Silver Carpet (Dymondia margaretae) and Dwarf Carpet of Stars (Ruschia nana).

No-mow ornamental grasses such as deergrass and sedges create a low-water meadow-like look, but are too clumpy for foot traffic or play areas.

"Many of the ornamental groundcovers that can replace turf are more water efficient, don't produce nearly as much green waste—think grass clippings—and don't require as much fertilizer," says Wheeler. "Many produce flowers and provide habitat to beneficial insects like bees."

Low-growing groundcovers that thrive in Santa Clarita include thyme, sedum and creeping rosemary. Wheeler recommends groundcover myoporum for slopes.

"There are lots of choices for replacing a high-water use turf lawn and no one plant is perfect for every situation," Wheeler notes. "Getting rid of ornamental lawn that doesn't get used—typically front yards, parkways, side yards, etc.—is one of the best ways to reduce water use in the landscape."

FOUR TURF SUBSTITUTES that are finding a lot of success in Southern California:

Photos courtesy of UC Davis, CalScape

KURAPIA
(LIPPIA NODIFLORA)



COMMON LIPPIA (CA NATIVE)
(PHYLA NODIFLORA)



DYMONDIA SILVER CARPET
(DYMONDIA MARGARETAE)



DWARF CARPET OF STARS
(RUSCHIA LINEOLATA 'NANA')



GET SMART WITH NEW TECH

Efficiency upgrades cut waste, put water ***where it's needed***

by DEBBIE ARRINGTON

Let technology help you enjoy a more water-efficient, easy-care landscape. A smart irrigation controller, rotator sprinkler heads, drip irrigation and more can help your garden grow healthier and take less work.

"Typically, plants don't need as much water as we think they do," says Jared Rice, executive vice president of Weathermatic, maker of efficient irrigation products. "Some have been drastically overwatered for years."

> *"Typically, plants don't need as much water as we think they do."*
>
> **Jared Rice**
> Executive vice president, Weathermatic

Too much water can cause as many plant problems as not enough, including weak roots, yellow leaves, branch drop, crown rot and death.

"All irrigation should do is replenish water that left the ground; no more, no less," Rice says.

Smart controllers adjust your irrigation according to the weather and other factors; no more sprinkler sprays during rain. It also takes the guesswork out of how long to run irrigation. Basic units cost $100 to $300, with potential rebates available.

"Smart controllers really take into account what's in your garden," Rice explains. "In general, smart controllers make run-time adjustments automatically based on weather and user inputs," such as types of sprinklers, plants and soil.

A wifi-enabled weather sensor mounted in your landscape picks up personalized, real-time weather reports and relays them to the controller. An app allows a user to make adjustments via their cellphone from anywhere.

Smart controllers typically save at least 20% of water usage over conventional controllers. Weathermatic users average 38% savings, Rice says.

Upgrading nozzles on sprinkler systems can offer immediate savings, says Rice. "Pressure regulating sprinklers can save up to 20% just by changing out the heads. It balances the hydraulics along the whole zone, so plants aren't overwatered or underwatered."

Rotating stream sprinkler heads deliver big drops slower and more accurately than old-style spray sprinklers. Those heavy drops soak in instead of running off.

Whatever your irrigation type, don't ignore it.

"You need to do irrigation checks," Rice says. "Even at my own home, I walk around at least once a month, making sure heads spray where they should go and there are no leaks in the drip-lines. … [Irrigation uses] plastic components in the ground. Ultimately, parts will wear out."



A smart sprinkler timer or controller is easy to install and even easier to use.

IRRIGATE EFFECTIVELY: HOW TO CYCLE AND SOAK

Clay soil and steep slopes predominate Santa Clarita Valley landscapes—and both contribute to runoff, especially off lawns. Help your irrigation be more effective by learning how to cycle and soak.

Whether using high-efficiency sprinklers or standard spray, slow application allows water to soak in better. That makes for stronger roots and healthier plants.

Once lawn irrigation reaches run-off stage, no more water will soak in. Instead of watering your lawn or other landscaping, you're watering the sidewalk or street.

Water tends to run downhill, which is why slopes tend to be problematic. Clay soils often have drainage issues, including the inability to soak a lot of water fast. The "cycle and soak" method breaks up how long your sprinklers run into separate segments that allow water to permeate clay soil.

Every landscape is different, so let your own home and observation guide you:

- **FIRST, DETERMINE** how long you can run your sprinklers before you see run-off; this could be as little as three minutes with spray heads or 10 minutes with rotator heads.
- **SET YOUR TIMER** to operate the sprinklers just below that run-off point. For example, if you see run-off at five minutes, set the first cycle for four minutes. Then schedule a second run time of the same length 60–90 minutes later.
- **THE SECOND APPLICATION** actually reaches deeper into the root zone, studies show. That creates a healthier, more drought-resistant lawn as well as other landscaping.
- **SCHEDULING IS MUCH EASIER** with a "smart" sprinkler timer or irrigation controller; rebates may be available for this useful upgrade. A smart irrigation controller uses information about your individual site conditions, such as temperature, soil moisture, rain, wind, slope, soil, plant type, etc., to automatically adjust irrigation times to apply the right amount of water to your landscape.
- **For details: yourSCVwater.com/save-water-money/#_rebates**









DO'S AND DON'TS OF LAWN MAKEOVERS

Local landscape pros ***share their advice***

by DEBBIE ARRINGTON

Landscape experts Chris Horton and Kurt Jurado have decades of experience transitioning turf into water-wise alternatives.

A landscape architect, Horton is a senior associate with Pacific Coast Land Design and has worked on major makeovers at local parks and landmarks, including the Santa Clarita sports complex. Owner of AIM Landscape & Irrigation, Inc., Jurado has designed hundreds of Santa Clarita area residential landscapes—including scores of drought-tolerant transformations.

"Water-wise landscapes have had some momentum with the help of the water agency rebates," Jurado says. "SCV Water has also done a great job connecting homeowners with landscape designers. If the designer can create a landscape that complements the home and the homeowner's style, it is a win-win."

They know what works—and what doesn't.

"Looking forward, most turf is a thing of the past," says Horton. "It's harder and harder to justify keeping turf," especially when there are so many benefits to making the switch.

"The biggest benefit to water-wise landscapes is sustainability," Jurado says.

In fact, experts agree that Southern California cannot endure large ornamental grass areas as the climate changes and droughts become more frequent and severe.

"All flora is essential," Jurado says. "We simply need to incorporate those plants that do well in Santa Clarita, the plants that will survive the extreme heat and freezing temperatures but also reduce water usage.

"A second benefit is the lower maintenance cost," he adds. "Most drought-tolerant landscapes can be maintained with a limited amount of time, reducing the cost of gardening services."

MAKEOVER DON'TS

- **DON'T** plant turf, says Horton. Unless you need play space for pets and kids, plant something that uses less water.
- **DON'T** replace grass with artificial or synthetic turf. Says Horton, "This product gets really hot and may increase your bills for cooling your home."
- **DON'T** overwater. "[It's] the most common mistake homeowner's make when transitioning to drought-tolerant landscapes," says Jurado. "Most people are accustomed to watering plants when they start to wilt; drought-tolerant plants will not survive over-watering. Proper irrigation design and scheduling is very important."
- **DON'T** stop watering trees. The lawn may be gone, but keep irrigating trees, your landscape's most valuable asset.

MAKEOVER DO'S

- **CREATE** a design before you start digging. "Take photos, use Pinterest, provide direction for a designer," says Jurado. "It is important that the homeowner is clear about what they don't like."
- **DETERMINE** what areas will be "hardscaped," covered with something other than plants and mulch. Hardscape includes permeable paths, decomposed granite, boulders, gravel, etc.
- **UNDERSTAND** your soil conditions. Perform a soil test and amend soil as needed.
- **INSTALL** plants that are proven for this area, says Jurado. "Don't get plant risky. Add unique plants over time, but have a good plant base."
- **PLANT** the right trees. "The best thing you can do: Plant trees that will grow in your location," Horton says. "Trees are really central to human survival in hot climates—they give us shade and oxygen. They provide excellent habitat to birds and bees. They're critical to everything we need." His suggestions: oaks, western redbud, strawberry tree, desert willow and mesquite.
- **PLANT** pollinator-friendly plants, preferably native or adapted to our climate. Wildlife needs flowers with nectar and pollen, says Horton. Native wildlife prefers native plants. Examples: California lilacs, California poppies, yarrow, milkweed, California fuchsia and "every sage or salvia."
- **USE** foundation plants to create a buffer with your neighbors. Suggestions include: coyote bush, coffeeberry, currants and toyon.
- **USE** shredded bark or other organic mulch, not rock and gravel mulch. Organics help build light fluffy soil; rocks absorb heat and cook roots.

These easy-care front yards attract pollinators and offer interest year round. They all started with thoughtful planning. **Photos courtesy of GardenSoft**

AN EXPERT'S TAKE ON WATER-WISE GARDENING

Landscape designer offers advice for a ***thoughtful makeover***

by DEBBIE ARRINGTON

Landscape designer Mary Elizabeth Jacobsen of Songbird Garden Design in Santa Clarita knows the value of a well-placed plant. For example: A row of society garlic along a busy sidewalk keeps passing dogs from stopping to sniff (or more).

"It works!" she says. "They don't like the smell, so they stay off your landscape."

As part of SCV Water's Design Assistance Program, Jacobsen helps homeowners who would like to transition away from traditional thirsty turf-based landscapes to something beautiful and diverse that takes less maintenance and worry, as well as less water.

After working in the music industry for many years, Jacobsen became intrigued by garden design when she moved to Los Angeles. "I love plants and drawing, so I put two and two together," says the native New Yorker.

At Pierce College, she discovered the importance of water-wise gardening and made it a core part of her landscape designs.

What are some of the benefits of a water-wise landscape?

Besides the environmental benefits, it's a great way to save money on water and electric bills. Part of water-wise gardening is supporting your shade trees and they cool down your home, so you save money on air conditioning. For someone like me, the big benefit is beauty. Your landscape is full of beautiful plants that look good year round—with less work. And all those flowers help wildlife—that's very important. We want to attract bees, birds and butterflies into our gardens and our community. These are all positives.

Why make the switch now?

Rebates are better than ever—take advantage of those rebates! Like water, money is finite; you don't know how long those rebates will last. The caveat: Converting from thirsty lawn to a drought-tolerant beautiful garden takes money. Rebates won't cover the full cost; there will be some out-of-pocket expense. But there will be future savings.

How do you get started?

What's your budget? You need some money for any home project, and plants aren't cheap. They're an investment. Call one of us [landscape designers and consultants] listed on the SCV Water website and schedule a two-hour consultation. We do charge, but you'll be reimbursed by SCV Water if you move forward.

The next step: Look at drought-tolerant gardens and decide what you like. If you're not familiar with plants, take photos and let experts at local nurseries help you. Make sure you choose the right plants for the right place. If you have full sun, don't plant something that needs full shade; it will die.

Reconnect with your neighbors; if you see that a neighbor has a beautiful garden, don't be afraid to knock on their door and ask—how did they do it?

What are your favorite trees?

Arbutus 'Marina,' the strawberry tree. I just love it! The bark looks like manzanita and it's not messy at all. I also love palo verde. It's native to our area and needs very little water. The desert willow—Chilopsis linearis—is an excellent small tree with attractive flowers.

What are your go-to plants?

I love Tecoma stans 'Lydia.' It blooms all summer with yellow, fragrant flowers. I love yarrow and you can now find it in almost every color such as the 'Moonshine' yellow, pink and apricot. It goes well with salvias. Salvia 'Mysty' is a beautiful blue sage and Salvia clevelandii—Cleveland sage—makes a beautiful shrub. I like dwarf nandina 'Lemon-Lime'; it's a wonderful chartreuse color.

I use a lot of carex and muhlenbergia; they give texture. I love Australian plants; they're so hardy and fun. Westringia 'Blue Gem' (Australian coast rosemary) is a really wonderful small shrub; it's so drought tolerant and so hardy. It looks beautiful and you don't have to think about it.



Mary Elizabeth Jacobsen of Songbird Garden Design helps local residents transition their landscapes from turf to water-wise alternatives. **Photos by Salvador Ochoa**

> *"For someone like me, the big benefit is beauty. Your landscape is full of beautiful plants that look good year round—with less work."*
>
> **Mary Elizabeth Jacobsen**
> Landscape designer,
> Songbird Garden Design



TALL SLIPPER PLANT (PEDILANTHUS BRACTEATUS)

SHAW'S AGAVE (AGAVE SHAWII)



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GET REBATES

Rebates are available for water-wise landscape transformations and irrigation upgrades. Learn about SCV Water's Lawn Replacement Program, plus incentives for use of native plants, drip irrigation and more!

GET EXPERT ADVICE

Start an application and schedule a pre-inspection with WaterWise, then use the Design Assistance Program. Also access the online rebate estimator tool, and plug in different components of projects and see what incentives are available.

FIND THE RIGHT PLANTS FOR YOUR PLACE

Download the "Top 100 SCV-Friendly Plant Guide." Replace your lawn with sustainable water-wise alternatives.



For a comprehensive list of perennials, groundcovers, shrubs, ornamental grasses and trees, visit **santaclaritagardens.com**

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