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**NORTH COUNTY TIMES**

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**THE CALIFORNIAN**

Last modified Sunday, October 5, 2008 12:19 AM PDT

## Looking sharp with low-water-use landscaping

By BRADLEY J. FIKES - Staff Writer

Want to replace that thirsty green grass turf with landscaping more suited to Southern California's climate? Plenty of help is available, and it doesn't have to cost a cent.

Starting is as easy as taking a walk through gardens with water-wise plants. These can be your neighbors', or those at public institutions. More advanced help in the low-water-use landscaping, called "xeriscape," is available from nurseries and gardeners, as well as from lectures and workshops.

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Besides saving money on your water bill, low-water-use landscaping generally requires less upkeep to look tidy, landscaping experts say. If you use native vegetation, fertilizer isn't required. Moreover, with California officially in drought and future water supplies precarious, saving water is becoming an imperative.

But before you dig up a single square inch of grass, familiarize yourself with any landscaping restrictions that might apply to your neighborhood. If your area is governed by a homeowners association, learn its rules for landscaping first. Within those limits, do what you like.

### By the rules

Norm Halus of Vista's Shadowridge community converted from turf to a low-water-use landscape after the drought of the early 1990s. Halus landscaped with native and drought-resistant plants. Local nurseries helped him find appropriate plants such as Mexican sage. For ground cover, he used bark chips.

For water, Halus installed a drip irrigation system.

"I used to have a 5-acre parcel in Wildomar, and I learned about drip irrigation then. I just carried it over when I moved here," Halus said.

Halus lives in the same Mallorca subdivision as Judy and Richard Bieksha, who ran afoul of the Shadowridge homeowners association for their unapproved landscape project. Halus said he took heed of the rules when designing his landscape and had no trouble gaining approval.

Halus estimates his water use dropped by at least 60 percent after he put in the water-wise xeriscape.

#### Recognition

An annual countywide contest recognizes the best low-water-use landscaping. It's on the Web at [landscapecontest.com](http://landscapecontest.com).

Vallecitos Water District winner Lisa Ruiz moved into a San Marcos home that had already been xeriscaped with cactuses and other succulents and flowers.

"We chose the house for that reason," Ruiz said. "We added some plants, but the majority was here already."

The landscape doesn't require much upkeep, just a little bit of weekly maintenance, Ruiz said. The yard doesn't even have a sprinkler system. "We used to have one, but we just didn't need it," she said.

When she won, Ruiz said she was told by the Vallecitos Water District

that her monthly water bill of about \$54 to \$64 was unusually low.

Vallecitos Water District showcases the Ruiz home at <http://tinyurl.com/4roj1q>.

Stroll around the grounds

Public gardens with low-water-use landscapes provide an education that doubles as a pleasurable outing.

Quail Botanical Gardens in Encinitas features vistas of California native plants in its California Gardenscapes section. And the Water Conservation Garden at Cuyamaca College in El Cajon is entirely devoted to low-water-use plants. Both include with their exhibits information on what conditions are best for the plants and how to care for them.

In Quail's Underseas Succulent Garden, various colorful cactuses and other succulents are arranged to give the appearance of an underwater seascape. While low on water use, it was actually planted for fire safety around Quail's offices, Executive Director Julian Duval said.

"It features an incredible diversity of succulent plant material that people in Arizona wish they could grow, but it gets too hot there for them," Duval said. "We have a lot more flexibility in things we can grow here that don't require a lot of water, but can't handle extreme heat."

Duval said the need to conserve water is prompting a much-needed discussion about what type of landscaping is appropriate for the region. "It's high time that people began to think about what should be the Southern California look to landscape," Duval said. "It shouldn't be something lush and tropical, it should be something different. If you use the right kinds of plants, it doesn't have to look like a desert."

Cuyamaca College's Water Conservation Garden was designed as a walk-through tutorial, said Marty Eberhardt, its executive director.

"Our exhibits are laid out so that you can learn how to do low-water-use landscaping by walking through the garden," Eberhardt said. "You can get as much or as little information as you want. It's beautiful, so you can just be inspired, but there's also signs with a huge amount of information and there's handouts."

The garden includes functional exhibits, such as one on drip irrigation methods. Different types of ground cover are showcased, along with gardens organized around a theme, such as a "white garden" with whitish vegetation and flowers. It's on the Web at <http://www.thegarden.org>.

Don't want to trek all the way to El Cajon? The conservation garden is coming to North County this month. Two free workshops on Oct. 17 will outline how homeowners associations and landscapers can team up to save water and save money on their water bill.

The morning workshop will be from 9 to 11 in Oceanside at the Civic Center Library Community Room, 330 N. Coast Highway.

The afternoon workshop will be from 1 to 3 in Poway's City Council chambers, 13325 Civic Center Drive.

Register by e-mail at [info@thegarden.org](mailto:info@thegarden.org) or by phone at (619) 660-0614, Ext. 10.

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