

# Public Garden

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EDUCATION  
AND SUSTAINABILITY

The turf exhibit is a good example of the Garden's "how-to" comparison exhibits.

### Water Conservation through Exhibits

The Garden is an interesting combination of how-to exhibits demonstrating traditional xeriscape principles and lovely gardens. The mulch exhibit displays 21 kinds of mulches; the turf exhibit shows seven kinds of turf. The ground cover display features both hardscape and living alternatives to turf. The compost area features several kinds of bins (although the worm bin is the hands-down favorite with children). A new irrigation exhibit will take people through the key issues in installing an irrigation system. Our most popular how-to display shows a grinning "Lawnmower Man" pushing a mower in a typical San Diego unkempt grassy backyard. The wall below points out that the landscape uses 28,000 gallons each year. The xeriscape next to it is unquestionably more appealing and uses a scant 6,000 gallons a year. Most people are sold immediately. These numbers are quite startling, but we know that the techniques we demonstrate can easily cut water use in half for many San Diegans.

The Garden also has attractive themed areas that would fit in most botanical gardens except that the plant material is nearly all drought tolerant and mostly from Mediterranean regions. There is a White Garden, a Cactus and Succulent Garden, a Bird and Butterfly Garden, a Container Garden, and our mini-oasis—a gazebo with a few roses and a bit of turf. A new fire-wise landscaping exhibit, with a scale model house and landscape, teaches the principles of saving water in the landscape while protecting your home from fire.

Recently, we have been working to encourage a broader audience. We've added child- and family-friendly signage and some hands-on exhibits (grinding acorns in a metate, for instance). We're starting to design a children's garden with our neighbors, Cuyamaca College's Child Development Center. We're thinking this will be one of a kind: a garden

The cactus garden brings winter color.



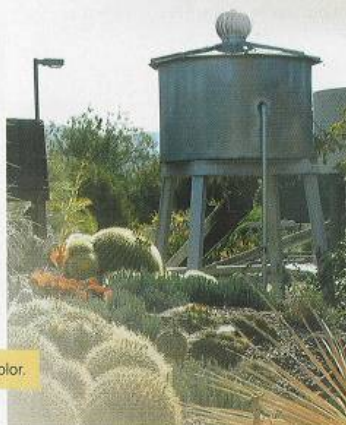
that trains teachers and has daily preschool visitors, as well as our own Garden visitors. Children will engage in fun activities that will, we hope, predispose them to caring about nature and conserving water when they're older.

### Water Conservation Through Programs

Our programs range from a "Secrets of the Garden" preschool summer camp to "Design your Own Landscape" for homeowners to a certification class for professional landscape maintenance people. The goal is to reach as many audiences as possible with our message in as many ways as we can.

Our festivals are becoming one of our trademarks. People can sign up for free, 20-minute landscape consultations, buy water-wise plants, hear lectures about native plant care, and at the same time, send their kids on a scavenger hunt and buy compost bins to the sounds of live salsa music. It's part of the same philosophy driving our exhibits: learn and enjoy yourself mightily in the process.


The certification classes are just a year old. They are a response to the question that we get quite often, "I can't find anyone to take care of my yard that knows a thing about saving water."



Rather than recommend individuals, we post class graduates on our web site and refer the public to them. We hear reports that business is good.

We also have about 60 adult classes a year. There is a quarterly Xeriscape Series and classes that help you design an irrigation system, a curbside strip, a butterfly garden, or a salvia garden. Our school tours focus on plant adaptations to drought and where our water comes from.

What we do is not terrifically different from what most public gardens do, except that everything conforms to our laser-like focus on water conservation. The good news is that we do seem to have an effect. A recent survey by a local water district showed that of those who visited the Garden, nearly half made a change in their landscapes as a result of their visit. Visitation has been growing from 8% to 30% a year in the last three years. We have a long way to go before most San Diegans visit, but the headlines in the newspaper are waking people up in new ways.

We look forward to a day when San Diego looks less like Honolulu or Michigan, and more like the Mediterranean region that it is. We hope and expect that the Water Conservation Garden will have a role in that change. 

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