



Spring: It's Time for Curb Appeal - Central Valley Style

by Michelle Le Strange, UC Master Gardener Advisor

Is it true that most homeowners don't really like to garden, but all want front yards with curb appeal and back yards for family fun and relaxation? Well, today's smart trend is moving to sustainable landscaping, which for us is "Gardening Central Valley Style".

Many have realized that it just "isn't cool anymore" to have a bunch of gas powered equipment droning on all day long in the neighborhoods. Isn't it about time to "come clean" with our own lawns and just put them where we really need them? It must be time to do a better job in choosing plants. It certainly is time to place plants where they can grow on our property without ridiculous pruning to keep them in size. Let's be smarter about our Central Valley landscapes, because it matters.

Don't get trapped thinking that it takes a lot of money to grow an appealing landscape, because it doesn't. But it does take a functional landscape design; it does take a little "smarts"; and it definitely takes a critical look at what is really working in your yard and what isn't. Figure out: what gets to stay, what needs to go, what needs to be fixed. Then take action! Spring is a great time to get landscapes in working order before the summer heat drives us all to our lawn chairs.

Review your lawn: Lawn care is nobody's favorite chore (except for maybe mine), but we sure seem to like them. Many of us bought our lawns with the house. Maybe we like them just how they are. Or maybe it's time to change out a portion of lawn for a better living space? Consider a small patio or sitting area, a barbecue spot, vegetable garden, grape vine arbor, flower bed, rock garden, a kid's play house, or a parent's outdoor bar, or even a screen for the trash cans. Yes, the list is endless.

Many neighbors share a lawn between driveways that might be better suited to a row of small shrubs or a small picket fence to screen the parked cars. Consider removing a swath of lawn and replacing it with a different ground cover. These alternatives would reduce mowing, noise, and water usage. Add some stepping stones or a dry creek bed. All these ideas will cut down on your work in the yard and add to curb appeal.

Is your landscape overgrown, overcrowded with plants? Can't see out of your house because your bushes are too tall? Can't walk down the pathway because your shrubs are overgrown? Can't find the sprinklers because plants have taken over? I think you get the hint. It's time to remove the clutter. Don't be afraid to pull out some plants, clear an area and start over.

Design creates appeal: Planted areas don't have to be big to have a dramatic effect. Start with the shape of the lawn and flower beds. Most of us have square or rectangular back yards with a

square concrete patio and a cedar fence to serve as a backdrop. One simple remedy is to add a gentle curve to each planted area. This keeps the eye moving and looking for more.

Plant selection: Remember we live in a Mediterranean Climate. We have hot, dry summers and cool, damp winters. Sunset's Western Garden Book is newly revised and helps gardeners zone in on plants for their area.

Visit your nursery and choose plants adapted to this climate. Planting in groups at appropriate spacings creates waves of color and interest with less garden maintenance. Before purchasing, create mini vignettes of your plants at the nursery and talk over your ideas.

Keep it simple: Gardening Central Valley Style leads to beautiful gardens with less work. Adopting regionally appropriate gardening techniques saves time, energy, and resources, and reduces air and noise pollution from power equipment and water contamination from garden chemicals. Let's spring into sustainable landscaping!

Ranch house before



Ranch house after



March 22, 2012