



Creating a Water Wise Yard - Part 2*

by Susan Schieferle, UC Master Gardener

*This is part two of a two-part series on creating a water-wise yard.

We did it! We made the (easy) decision to say goodbye to our front lawn forever! You can do it too!

Cal Water Service inspired us by offering a rebate program giving homeowners \$1 per square foot of lawn removal up to 1,000 square feet. *“At least 50% of the lawn removal area (including permeable hardscape areas) must be landscaped with climate-appropriate plants (artificial turf does not meet program guidelines). The entire Project Area other than paths and ground cover areas must be mulched with at least a two inch layer of organic or inorganic mulch. Mulched areas must be permeable, i.e. they must allow water to pass through. Examples of mulches are bark, wood chips, gravel, decomposed granite, mortar-less pavers, and river rock.”* <https://calwater-turf.droplet.us>

We applied and were approved with 120 days to complete the project. After submitting a plot diagram, an irrigation plan, and drought tolerant plant list, we launched our project!

Sod Cutting Method: We chose this quicker method and began one week before lawn removal by spraying the lawn with glyphosate, an herbicide. We dug around the sprinkler heads, flagged them, and capped off the ones we did not want to use [FYI, we capped off 14 out of 19!]. Using a gas powered sod cutting machine, we cut the lawn lengthwise and crosswise, creating squares which were easy to pick up and dispose into extra green waste cans that we rented.

Raking and Leveling is a tedious but critical task to remove leftover dead grass and weeds and level the remaining soil. Next we sprayed the entire area with a pre-emergent herbicide to prevent germination or survival of weed seedlings. Make sure this herbicide saturates and covers the entire turf free areas.

Irrigation Changeover involved taking existing uncapped risers, converting them to pressure regulating hose line feeds with a 90 degree elbow, to a threaded reducer, and to a 25 pound pressure regulator and hose connector. Next lines of hose were laid out along the planting area, and spaghetti tubing was run from the hose to the plant holes. Test the irrigation now.

Placement of boulders, trees, and plants was marked using a marking spray paint. Boulders were set in place. We also extended our original conventional flowerbed using 4 inch river rocks to make a curvy, more appealing border. We used the same rocks to line our mow strips to complement this flowerbed.

Holes for plants were dug about 3 times as wide and deep as the plant roots since we have clay soil which does not drain well. If you have better quality loam soil, dig the holes twice as wide and deep as the root ball. Mix in some soil amendment with your existing soil.

Landscape fabric, also known as weed cloth was laid over the entire area, cutting crisscross slits in the fabric over the planting holes. Even though we used a weed killer on the lawn and a pre-emergent on the top soil, we made the decision to cover our plot with a tightly woven landscape fabric to block sunlight and help deter future weeds.



Before



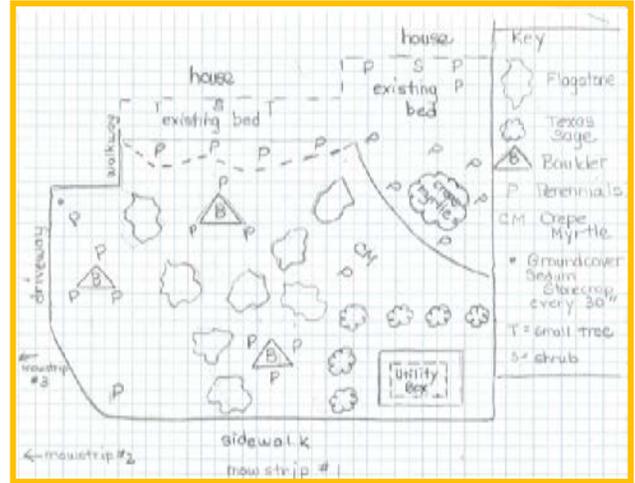
After

Placement of permeable hardscape came next. We used flagstone stepping stones to make a path through our yard and mow strips. Sand underneath leveled them.

Planting was the fun part! After planting was complete we installed emitters on the spaghetti tubing and tested the drip irrigation again.

Mulching was next. Refer to the guidelines above from Cal Water. We chose humus, an organic matter in a highly decayed state which can provide nutrients to plants and look more aesthetically pleasing until the groundcover takes over.

DONE and YEAH! Sit back and relax and enjoy your new water-wise landscape. Every year will bring more color and depth to your yard as the plants flourish.



Plants that we used around our three boulders were salvias and penstemons in pinks, purples, and whites. These wispy perennials provide sprinkled color from spring to fall and again in years to come! We planted a mini crape myrtle (deep pink) which can be trained in a topiary shape. Around a big electrical box, we planted *Texas Sage*, a very water-wise shrub with tiny lavender flowers which will eventually conceal the box from our garden view. For groundcover, we selected Succulent *Sedum Tricolor* (with pink blooms) and *Dragon's Blood* (with burgundy blooms) for an interesting color mix. A lacey *Gaura*, called the wand flower, welcomes visitors to our yard. Up the driveway, the *Gallardia*, or blanket flower, says hello, please come in!

PLANT LISTS: The following is a comprehensive drought tolerant plant list which catalogs plants by trees, shrubs and perennials, vines, annuals, and bulbs. It also includes placement of each plant around places the yard.

Water Efficient Landscape Plant List by University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources
<http://ucanr.edu/sites/sacmg/files/117288.pdf>

California Water Service is partnering with the UCCE Tulare Master Gardener Program and Ewing Irrigation to offer a free water-efficient landscaping class to Cal Water customers.

Registration is required, and space is limited. To register for this free class, call (559) 624-1660 or e-mail smcnamara@calwater.com by August 26, 2015.

Conservation Gardening and Irrigation Techniques

Date: Saturday, August 29, 2015

Time: 10 a.m. - noon

Where: College of the Sequoias

August 22, 2015