

How to Save Water and Money in Your Yard

by Morgan Cantrell

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Wouldn't you like to worry less about droughts, spend less on infrastructure, and have more water in lakes and creeks for us and wildlife to enjoy? More than two-thirds of California's outdoor urban water use is residential, and we use as much water outdoors as indoors, so your yard is a great place to save. Start with these ideas:

Landscape with native plants A garden of local natives will thrive without any additional water, fertilizer or pesticides, and attract beautiful butterflies and birds. Start with one section of your yard and use your favorite plants seen on local hikes as inspiration. Some of my favorites are California fuchsia, lupine, sticky monkeyflower, soap root, mariposa lily, poppy, madrone, huckleberry, and Pacific wax myrtle. Converting your lawn and garden will reduce your outdoor water use 30–70%.

For the best selection, visit The Watershed Nursery in Point Richmond, O'Donnell's Fairfax Nursery, and CNL Native Plant Nursery in Mill Valley.

Convert or evolve your lawn It's comfy to walk on, your dogs and kids like it, it's entertaining to mow...but it takes so much water to keep it green and it's no longer admirable to have one! Replace some or all of your traditional lawn with a low-water garden, alternative grass, or a permeable patio of decomposed granite, gravel or pavers. Marin Water (aka Marin Municipal Water District or MMWD) will do most of the planning work for you and then pay you once you've replaced it. When it comes to alternative grasses, consider natives that develop deep roots and resemble meadows rather than a traditional English garden. American Soil in San Rafael has a good selection of gravel and granite that allow rain to soak through. The important things are to create spaces you love, absorb rainwater, and use less water from our reservoirs.



A native plant garden, like this one at the Mill Valley Library, looks great, attracts wildlife and dramatically reduces water use. Photo by Laura Lovett

Reuse water from your laundry Even an efficient washing machine uses about 14 gallons per load. There is a variety of ways to reroute that water to your landscape so it doesn't go into the sewer system. Use biodegradable detergent and make sure you have the option to divert the water to your sewer if you're washing a load that includes things like diapers or medical scrubs. This can be an efficient way to save money and water.

Marin Water has partnered with the Urban Farmer Store to offer a \$100 discount on your purchase of a laundry-to-landscape graywater kit and has information and seminars available on their website.

Implement a timed drip irrigation system The best and easiest way to water is with an automated drip system that adjusts itself based on the weather. Water in early morning to avoid root rot and unnecessary evaporation. (You can be fined \$250 for watering after 9 a.m.) Adding a layer of mulch helps retain moisture, as will watering at the soil level instead of spraying water on leaves. Use of drip irrigation is currently limited, and Marin Water has a rebate program that offers up to \$100 back on WaterSense irrigation controllers. Droughts are becoming more common, and we need to adapt to keep our watershed healthy. Marin Water has set a goal of reducing water use by 40% this year and our yards are great places to start.

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