



Save Water

Convert your lawn into a Native Landscape.

With water rationing near, many of you are eyeing your lawn as an obvious place to save water. Why not convert that “freshwater marsh” into a native landscape? Turf can use 30 gallons of water per square foot per year versus about 2 to 6 for a native landscape! The following steps can help you achieve an easy-care landscape full of color, fragrance, butterflies and birds.

Step 1: Removing the existing turf If you have lots of Bermuda then spray the lawn with an herbicide while it is lush. Then irrigate and repeat as new shoots come up. This may have to be repeated. Otherwise, use a spade or sod-cutter to strip the turf about two inches down, which also removes some rich topsoil (amendments are bad for natives).

In some cases, you may need to dig down 18 inches to remove stubborn rhizomes – you might want to take a class or consult an expert on different options for permanently removing grass, which can be challenging.

Once stripped away, try composting the old grass for a veggie or rose garden. Spot removal or spraying may still be required later. Grass specific herbicides are excellent for this.



CNPS Gardening Committee

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**Thanks to Greg Rubin for the
contents of this fact sheet.**

Step 2: Adapt the irrigation Natives do better with rainfall-like overhead watering. MP Rotator nozzles by Hunter (www.hunterindustries.com) are stream rotors that will retrofit most sprinkler heads. They irrigate like gentle rain.

Step 3: Incorporate features Now is the time to install paths, rocks or other garden features.

Step 4: Plan your planting Use evergreen natives like Ceanothus and Manzanita to form the backbone of your garden. Colorful perennials, such as Penstemon, seaside daisy, monkeyflower, and California fuchsia are best used on the edges, where one can see the color and most importantly, easily reach the flowers for dead-heading after blooming. However, these same perennials can be added for quick fill and color between the backbone plants.

Since most perennials are ecological pioneers, they can help burn up excess fertility (left over from the lawn) while readily establishing the mycorrhizal fungal partnerships so important to a successful native landscape. Eventually, these pioneer plants are succeeded (and overgrown) by the evergreens, thus leaving the perennials along the edges where you want them. Native nurseries can help with plant selection.

Step 5: Finishing up It is important to water each one-gallon plant with about five gallons of water to remove air pockets. And, applying a granular pre-emergent herbicide helps control annual weeds, followed by three to four inches of shredded redwood bark pulled back three inches from each plant (or you can just use the bark, but be prepared to weed). Water about once per week with the equivalent of roughly ¼ inch of rainfall (that's about 30 minutes for an MP-Rotator).

Summer plantings may require watering about every 5 days until the advent of winter rains, when you can let Nature take care of the plantings (watering at the beginning of Santa Ana winds only). Try pushing that interval out to ten to fourteen days starting the following spring. Have fun!

