



What are you Going to do with a Brown Lawn?

By Barbara Finley

UCCE Master Gardener of El Dorado County

It's officially Fall and we are still in a drought and we still have watering restrictions. Front lawns that are visible are in all shades of brown. Will those lawns be restored with a good rainy season, or, are they done for? If you are in this position, what is your plan for the area?

It's not necessary to replace dead lawn with new lawn. For starters some of the lawns have survived, but lack the rich green color we think of with grass. With some winter rains their color will return. We live in what's considered a Mediterranean area, with some of us on ¼ acre parcels, and some on 10 acre or more parcels. Whatever the amount of lawn, it is a stated fact that maintaining grass requires a lot of time and water, and eliminating it can be a wise thing to do.

What can lawns be replaced with? There are many delightful options that can add beauty, interest, and usability. Lawns can be replaced with rocks or mulch such as bark, or pea gravel; by themselves, these could be rather boring. However, combining those with native grasses, drought tolerant plants, shrubs, or trees, can create a very unique look. Use pea gravel and put in some pathways perhaps leading to a bench. Use pots filled with a single plant or a variety of plants and strategically place them as a landscape point of interest. The use of perennials and annuals give a splash of color. And don't forget succulents that aren't as water-hungry.

New plants require water to become established. The amount and frequency is dependent on the type of plant. Keep in mind while the cost and amount of time tending may be high initially, if plants are nurtured properly and carefully the first two to three years, they will be easier to maintain and require less water in the future.

Another example of replacing grass with an established tree is to remove the grass as wide as the canopy and then put down a pathway of pea gravel. The rain will filter through the pea gravel so the roots will get the water they need. Native ornamental grasses are a lovely addition to any landscape, and some even change color seasonally. Planting a row of shrubs can become a hedge.

Depending on where the lawn area was, it may be fitting to change it into a courtyard area or patio. Put down large pavers, accent with potted containers add a water feature and you have a

nice area to hang out. Depending on the already-established yard design, consider widening garden beds perhaps with ground cover that is more drought tolerant.

The important message here is: do not be discouraged by the water restrictions and what seem to be limited options for the yard and garden. Look at it as an opportunity to expand the vegetable garden, intermixing vegetables with flowers. Consider shady versus sunny areas for what plants you select. Remember, anything newly planted requires water to become established. Be wise in your plant choices and in watering technique, and you can continue to have a lovely outdoor space.

There is no Master Gardener class scheduled for this Saturday. UCCE Master Gardeners seek your opinion on where, when, and what subjects should be taught at their free public education gardening classes. Help them understand how to best serve our community by filling out a brief online survey at <http://bit.ly/1qCsRIId>. Paper copies of the survey are also available at the UCCE Master Gardener office.

UCCE Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome. The office is located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our website at http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Master_Gardeners/ and <http://www.facebook.com/pages/El-Dorado-County-Master-Gardeners/164653119129>.