

May 20, 2015

A New Look at Water in Your Landscape and Garden
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Have you been wondering what to do with your landscape because of California's ongoing drought? We have an old and tired (30 years) landscape, in need of renewal. But for nine years, I managed the Hope Community Garden, located in El Dorado on property owned by Federated Church. It was a wonderful place, and gardeners harvested lots of yummy produce, herbs and flowers over the years. We also donated a lot of excess produce to the local Plant a Row for the Hungry Project, overseen by another Master Gardener and myself. But it took a lot of my energy, and my own landscape became neglected. When the garden was sold about two years ago, my thought immediately focused on redoing our own landscape. But guess what! Since that time, a few things interfered with my plans: DROUGHT, extended vacation plans, and DROUGHT.

Imagine my delight when I learned that our April speaker for the monthly Master Gardener meeting titled her topic: "Converting to a Low-water Use Landscape: A How-to." Our speaker was Karrie Reid, an Environmental Horticulture Advisor with the San Joaquin County UCCE office, and what a great talk she gave. I kept wishing my husband had attended her talk, but she was gracious enough to share her Power Point with us, and gave me permission to use several of her slides for this article.

For many people, like me, this will be a transition year, as homeowners try ever harder to eliminate unnecessary water use. This involves identifying lawn (or parts of lawns) that can go, turning off water to underperforming plants or plantings that ultimately need to be replaced, and deciding on ways that hardscape might replace irrigated areas. Thanks to Kerrie, I realized that this effort could be a multi-year process.

Kerrie Reid's suggestions for the steps you should take:

1. Assess your plants.
2. Assess your irrigation.
3. Make a plan.
4. Change or fix your hardscape.
5. Install/convert irrigation.
6. Plant new material.

I found her list (in the box) to be most helpful. I liked that I could break her list into sections, realizing that selecting and planting new plants is the LAST thing on the list. It's not that I didn't know most of what she said; it just confirmed it for me.

Many people have old landscapes or inherited ones that were planted before the new water reality of California AND before so many native and low water use plants

were available in nurseries. In addition, there are so many new, more efficient irrigation systems and timers to choose from today.

In terms of Steps 1 and 2, there is a really helpful resource provided by University of California called WUCOLS (Water Use Classification of Landscape Species). This amazing document, which can be found at <http://ucanr.edu/sites/WUCOLS/>, ranks plants according to their water use. Reid highly recommends that folks review the User Guide before using WUCOLS for the first time. You can look up plants by their botanical or common name and then cross reference them against your area (in our case, Placerville). Kerrie was involved in some of the research for this, and is convinced that most Californians overwater or incorrectly water their plants.

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WUCOLS will probably be an eye opener in regard to the water needs of your current plants, as well as some of the plants that you might ultimately choose as replacements. Because her presentation involved converting a landscape, she made it really clear that just as new plants need more water the first year or more, established plants can't adapt overnight from being overwatered to being watered drastically less. She encourages gardeners to get a long stick or screwdriver to identify just how deep the soil is wet. Begin by watering for longer periods less frequently, which encourages the plant roots to go deeper into the soil.

She also emphasized the need to irrigate and protect your trees, because they are so much more difficult and costly to replace. Her illustration for tree watering showed the water being applied outward from the drip line (the edge of the foliage) for about the same distance as from the trunk to the drip line. This is because that's where the absorbing roots are primarily located. Then provide between 12 and 24 inches deep of water.

Perhaps the comment that resonated most with the audience was "Plants aren't children - it's OK to get rid of them if they don't perform." Even Master Gardeners could relate to that one! I wish every one of our readers could have been at her presentation. Whether you have been planning a major makeover of your landscape, or are taking action because of the drought, do the planning and removal of "no longer loved" plants and learn about new irrigation options now, so you can move forward when the time is right. Special thanks to Kerrie Reid for generously sharing her knowledge and work so Master Gardeners could share it with you.

There is no Master Gardener public class this Saturday, May 23, 2015: enjoy your Memorial Day weekend. UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are at local farmers markets and are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmg>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter. You can also find us on Facebook.