

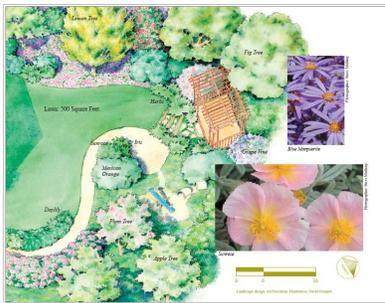
Turf Alternatives: Planting California Natives and Low Water Use Perennials

Tired of paying to water that lawn? Is your lawn small and difficult to water effectively without over spray and runoff? Have you been wondering what to plant in place of the grass in that narrow median strip between your house and the street? Consider converting it to a water efficient perennial landscape.

Winter is the best time to plant low water using California natives or Mediterranean perennials. Planting in winter allows the root system to become better established before the start of warm summer weather, optimizing the plant's ability to forage for water and nutrients during times of higher stress. Here are a few things to consider.

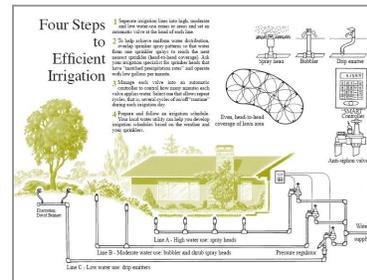


Photo by Garden Soft



- ❖ Create a plan before beginning work. This includes gathering not only information about the plants, but about how best to irrigate them as well. There are many resources available online or at the library to help you decide on the best layout, plant selection, and irrigation technology for your specific site.

- ❖ Start with healthy, vibrant looking plants from a reputable, local nursery. The nurseries that specialize in California native and Mediterranean species can be a great source of useful information.



- ❖ Avoid the temptation to purchase large container stock. Plants in 4" pots or gallon containers are quick to establish, fill out nicely in one growing season, and are much less work to plant.



- ❖ Keep in mind the size of the plants at maturity when creating your planting and irrigation layout. Don't let the small size of young plants fool you into planting too closely or too densely. Likewise, make sure the irrigation system is

installed with future growth in mind. Drip lines and emitters placed too tightly against a plant are a common source of future leaks that occur as the crowns of woody perennials expand, overtake, and damage the irrigation system.

- ❖ Be sure to amend the planting area with good quality, finished compost, working it into the soil with a garden fork to the depth of the plant roots. But not too much! The idea is to add enough supplemental fertility to help ensure the early success of your plants, with the long-term goal being plants that are mostly or entirely self-reliant. Overly vigorous growth is an open invitation to insect pests, creates or increases the need for pruning, and generates excessive amounts of green waste being sent to landfills.



- ❖ Don't wait until summer to install the irrigation system. Do it now when the plants are small, easy to work around, and when there is less chance of disturbing plant roots. Make sure everything is working properly now, and then check everything again in the early summer when you first turn it on for the season. Visual inspections of the irrigation system should be done regularly and at the first sign of plant stress.

- ❖ Mulch the area after planting. A uniform application, 2" to 4" deep, will help minimize the need for weeding and help retain moisture in the soil. Mulches made from recycled green wastes (lawn clippings, leaves, chipped tree trimmings) are inexpensive, readily available, and help divert products destined for the landfill back into creating healthy landscapes. Visit www.sonomacompost.com or pick-up a copy of *A Bay-Friendly Landscaping Guide to Mulch* at Utility Billing for more information.

