



*Colorful
low-water
bloomers*

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SPECIAL
SECTION



WATER-WISE DESIGN GUIDE

*Everything you need to give the hose
a rest, from unthirsty plant
picks to inspiring
gardens*

LOW WATER, BIG IMPACT

Recently, on the heels of another dry spell in California, I surveyed a patch of brown grass in my backyard and wondered: What does climate change mean for gardeners? With experts warning that droughts will only get worse, should we bother planting anything at all?

Glancing at the red-flowered penstemons blooming lustily despite my neglect, I realized: absolutely. Hundreds of plants not only tolerate drought, but do so beautifully. And of course the water-wise garden has practical benefits—namely, less maintenance and lower water bills.

On the following pages, we offer ideas to help you make the shift this fall, and plenty of proof that unthirsty gardens can be as interesting as well-watered greenbelts—perhaps even more so.

—Kathleen N. Brenzel, Garden Editor

Landscape irrigation accounts for 30% to 60% of residential water use—and about half of that is wasted, according to the EPA.



CASE STUDY #1: SAN DIEGO

Striking & sculptural

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA'S rare rains provide the only water that Chris and Margaret Sullivan's front yard gets. Yet its barrel and columnar cactus, Mexican blue fan palms, and *Yucca rostrata* all thrive. Arranged among boulders in randomly spaced groups like pieces of art, the plants grow in a decomposed granite-cactus mix blend, top-dressed with $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch Palm Springs Gold gravel. "This garden is 100 times less work than a lawn," says Chris, who hoses off the barrel cactus in summer only if they're dusty, and uses long-handled tweezers to extract weeds. "Rabbits eat neighboring gardens, but they've shown no interest in ours." —Debra Lee Baldwin



CORGOPSIS VERTICILLATA
'MOONBEAM'

CASE STUDY #2: LOS ALTOS, CA

Wild & Romantic

How a basic lawn can become a garden full of flowers and life

FOR YEARS, Pam and Mark Goodman cringed at the sight of their struggling lawn from the living room windows. Dreaming of a thriving garden, Pam started clipping photos of plants. By the time the couple met with garden designer Rebecca Sweet, Pam “must have had a thousand photos,” says Sweet.

Thumbing through the pictures, Sweet could see the couple loved a lush, colorful look. So she suggested planting unthirsty perennials with bright flowers and long bloom times, as well as replacing the lawn with low-water silver-blue *Dymondia margaretae*, which can handle foot traffic.

Since then, the garden has come alive with the bees, birds, and butterflies that the flowers attract. Now it's hard to walk through the living room without lingering by a window, says Pam. “It's like a forever-changing painting.”

DESIGN Rebecca Sweet, Los Altos, CA; harmonyinthegarden.com.

By JOHANNA SILVER



LEAFY REED GRASS
(CALAMAGROSTIS FOLIOSA)

CUT WATER
BILL
BY 40%

IDEAS TO STEAL



SEDUM SPURIUM
(‘DRAGON’S BLOOD’) WITH
DYMONDIA MARGARETAE

INVITE MEANDERING A winding flagstone path (large center photo) leads visitors through the garden. Its steppingstones are interplanted with dymondia and tiny sedums and edged with low, billowy *Sedum rupestre* (S.r. ‘Blue Spruce’ is pictured at bottom left).

CREATE A BIRD PARADISE The fountain, plants, and nesting-ready trees have drawn all kinds of birds to the yard. Hummingbirds zoom in on the red blooms of dwarf bottlebrush (*Callistemon viminalis* ‘Little John’; large center photo).

BRIGHTEN BORDERS Lavender fringes the fountain with a patch of purple flowers (sprigs shown opposite). Lion’s tail (*Leonotis leonurus*) adds bursts of velvety orange flowers to the border; it’s deer-resistant and drought-tolerant.

PICK NONSTOP BLOOMERS Along the path to the seating area, yellow-and-orange blanket flower (*Gaillardia x grandiflora* ‘Arizona Sun’) blooms constantly. “It’s so worth the \$8 to buy it in a gallon,” says Sweet. Elsewhere in the yard, *Coreopsis* (*C. verticillata* ‘Moonbeam’), with pale yellow flowers, blossoms from summer to fall as long as spent flowers are clipped.

SOFTEN THE EDGES To create a sense of flow, Sweet used curving borders and plants that spill over the edges. Leafy reed grass (*Calamagrostis foliosa*), for example, creates little bursts of green foliage that blend the planting bed with the dymondia lawn.



LION’S TAIL
(LEONOTIS LEONURUS)





CASE STUDY #3: SAN MARINO, CA

Tailored & textured

Bands of succulents, grasses, and shrubs create a living tapestry.

PLANTS MAY BE a new medium for interior designer Diane Lam, but she has years of experience with combining textures and colors. So when she and her husband, David Omori, decided to replace the grass and ivy in their front yard, her love of texture and color guided the design.

Working with landscape designer Darren Shirai and landscape architect Jeremy Taylor, Lam organized unthirsty ground-covers into bands that cross the yard like giant stripes on a rug.

All told, the bands feature six kinds of succulents, three kinds of shrubs, and one kind of grass. "It's a kaleidoscope of changing colors," Lam says.

The plants get watered weekly using a drip-irrigation system and need little trimming. And Lam actually relishes the maintenance that comes with easy-to-propagate succulents. When one of the plants grows too big for a space, she pulls it out and restarts snippets elsewhere in the garden—or pots it up to give as a gift.

DESIGN Bosque Design, Pasadena; bosque-la.com.



AEONIUM ARBOREUM



WATERED ONLY ONCE A WEEK

By JOHANNA SILVER

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: JENNIFER CHEUNG, RACHEL WEILL, JENNIFER CHEUNG (4); PAGE: JEFFERY CROSS

IDEAS TO STEAL

CHANNEL RAINWATER

A permeable pathway made of broken concrete packed with sand (opposite page) allows rainwater to pass into the ground, where it's accessible to plant roots.

GROW IN ROWS

Planting in long bands, ranging from 16 inches to 5 feet wide, gives structure to Lam and Omori's garden. But the look isn't rigid. "Wind and light add complexity with shadows and movement," says Lam. "The garden is always changing."

EXPLORE A SPECTRUM

"We have every shade of green and blue, from chartreuse to forest green and silvery blue—all shades that work well together," says Lam. *Crassula capitella thyrsiflora* 'Campfire' (front row in large photo), 'Elijah Blue' fescue (second row and bottom left), and silver-blue *Senecio* (third row) are accented by a deep burgundy Caribbean copper plant.

MARK THE SEASONS

An evergreen hedge of pine and pittosporum grows at the back of the garden. To add to the color show, Shirai planted aloes that bloom in spring to the existing deciduous Japanese maple (with vibrant fall foliage) next to the front door.



SENECIO TALINOIDES WITH
CRASSULA CAPITELLA 'CAMPFIRE'



CARIBBEAN COPPER PLANT
(EUPHORBIA COTINIFOLIA)



The cool crowd

LEFT A river of purple Spanish lavender (*Lavandula stoechas*) runs through a Napa Valley garden designed by Ron Lutsko (*lutskoassociates.com*), while clusters of chartreuse *Euphorbia rigida* add a spritz of lime. Both thrive with only moderate water. **ABOVE** Sea holly (*Eryngium amethystinum*), whose silvery blue stems are topped with amethyst flower heads, attracts butterflies and needs moderate water. **BOTTOM LEFT** The papery blooms of statice (*Limonium*) retain their color when dried. It requires moderate water. **BELOW** Humming-bird favorite *Salvia* 'Amistad' grows fast to 4 feet tall with little water.



PLANT PICKS

Low-water bloomers

These shrubs and perennials flower effortlessly in colors ranging from sky blue to flame orange.



SALVIA 'AMISTAD'



The hot list

TOP Velvety kangaroo paws (*Anigozanthos* 'Orange Cross' and Bush Gems series) add spicy color against golden grasses in a garden in Tiburon, California, designed by Arterra Landscape Architects (arterrallp.com). The plants tolerate drought but flower best with some water in summer and excellent drainage in light sandy soil. **ABOVE** Blanket flower (*Gaillardia*) features gorgeous golden tips and requires moderate water. **RIGHT** African daisy (*Arctotis*), with orange blooms, needs moderate water. →

PRO PICKS

Nan Sterman, a San Diego-based author and water-wise garden expert, loves these plants on both ends of the color spectrum for dry gardens.

PINCUSHION FLOWER
(*Leucospermum* 'Veld Fire')

"The plants make great informal hedges, start blooming in January and February, and pump out showy orange flowers for cutting."

CEANOTHUS
'Dark Star'

"Its purple buds open to intense blue flowers that attract bees. The leaves are dark green, small, and quilted, and the plant needs no summer water."

MEXICAN LILY
(*Beschorneria yuccoides*)

"It's underrated. Succulent leaves are soft and flexible, and the drooping clusters of coral blooms remind me of *Little Shop of Horrors*."

ALOES

"Dramatic leaves and striking blooms of yellow, red, or orange make them all-around perfect."

SUNDRUPS
(*Calylophus*)

"Low, mounding plants with nonstop yellow flowers."



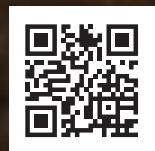
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sunset.com/waterwise

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PLANT PICKS

Container combos

Though plants in pots usually need more water than their counterparts in the ground, there are plenty of unthirsty options too. Garden designers share their favorites.



Fireworks, contained

A variegated *Aloe arborescens* with subtle stripes appears to explode above *Sedum* 'Lemon Coral' (provenwinners.com) in this 14-inch-high zinc container. "It's the best sedum I've grown," says Jarrod Baumann, who designed the planting. "It stays full and lush and doesn't look ratty, even after it's done blooming."

Design Zeterre Landscape Architecture, Los Altos, CA; zeterre.com.

Mood and attitude

"This is the plant of 2013," says San Francisco nursery owner Flora Grubb of the icy blue powder-covered *Echeveria cante*, right. "I've never seen a plant as iridescent as this one." Here, the succulent shimmers against moody dark foliage—'Cheryl's Shadow' geranium and 'Black Adder' phormium, which add structure in back. The 16-inch-wide container is made of lightweight plastic.



Tiny treasures

Costa Mesa garden designer Molly Wood fills vintage metal chicken feeders with tiny succulents for a rustic centerpiece. Hen and chickens (*Sempervivums*), echeverias, and a dainty stonecrop grow in cactus mix in a 4½-inch-deep trough, above. Find similar ones at flea markets or on etsy.com.

Design Molly Wood Garden Design, Costa Mesa, CA; mollywoodgardendesign.com. 🌱

TIPS FOR POTS

CHOOSE THE RIGHT POT Glazed ceramic, metals, and plastic prevent evaporation better than porous materials such as terra-cotta.

MULCH Cover the bare soil surface in pots with 1 to 2 inches of bark, compost, gravel, or stones to slow evaporation.

MONITOR MOISTURE Water when the soil is dry

an inch or two beneath the surface. Or install a drip-irrigation kit designed for pots (available at most garden centers) and put it on a timer.

REPOT AS NEEDED Root-bound plants dry out more quickly than ones whose roots have some room to grow. Put them into containers that are about a size larger.