


JUST ADD (LESS) WATER

When a couple wanted to reduce the water consumption in their Southern California garden, they turned to landscape designer Judy M. Horton. Here, she shares the best practices for creating a beautiful, water-wise garden, wherever you live.

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In an area that was once lawn, Horton planted a grove of California sycamores along with the native *Heuchera maxima*, which blooms profusely in spring. Next to the grove, she created a bed with two kinds of lavender, rosemary, and sculpted balls of germander (*Teucrium fruticosa*).

NO.1

RETHINK THE LAWN

In its need for water, a lawn is similar to a gas-guzzling car. Horton removed most of it here, leaving only a portion in the backyard. In its place she expanded the planting beds, and she gave the remaining lawn a new shape by adding trees and low-water plants, such as *Rosmarinus officinalis prostratus* 'Boule.' The fuchsia-flowering succulent *Calandrinia spectabilis* grows beneath a fruitless olive tree (*Olea europaea* 'Majestic Beauty').





NO.2

CREATE A LOW-WATER TAPESTRY

Horton knew she wanted to keep the area that was once lawn low and flat, so she planned a tapestry garden of low-growing water-wise plants, including thyme, Santa Barbara daisies, and *Echeveria* 'Hens and Chicks,' that will weave together as they mature in gravel. She also threw in a handful of taller "wild-card plants," scattering poppy and cardoon seeds "for drama."

Faced with skyrocketing water bills, Donivee and Merrill Nash were forced to rethink their home's plantings—and Donivee couldn't have been happier. "I had been waiting for years for an excuse to put in a garden," she says. "We had a nice yard, but it wasn't a real garden." So they hired Judy M. Horton (jmhgardendesign.com), a Los Angeles-based landscape designer and a fellow board trustee at the Los Angeles Arboretum Foundation, to create a beautiful but more climate-appropriate (read: water-wise) landscape.

Horton reduced the footprint of the thirstiest plants growing on the property—in other words, the lawn and the roses. Removing more than 10,000 square feet of lawn was "a no-brainer," she said. But Donivee also had a rose collection that she was quite fond of. "I thought it was a brave move to say, 'Okay, you can take out most of the roses in the back,'" Horton recalls. She then set about designing a garden that celebrated the landscaping advantages the Nashes already had—an existing hardscape and a great selection of mature trees—and presented the couple with a new, more unified vision. Horton chose purple, pink, white, gray, and silver low-water Mediterranean-climate plants, including lavender,

rosemary, germander, and olive. She also planted more than 20 new trees, including a grove of native California sycamores underplanted with spring-flowering heuchera, and added hundreds of white-blooming anemones, resplendent in autumn, to the existing birch grove. To replace the panels of lawn she had removed by the house, she laid down pea gravel as a mulch and created a romantic tapestry garden in one area and a formal olive-tree terrace by the master bedroom.

Six years after Horton's plan was put into place, the water bills have indeed been reduced. "Installing a water-saving garden is a long-term project," Donivee says. (New plants, even low-water ones, can require some supplemental watering until established.) In addition to reducing their water consumption, the couple has also gone organic. "One of the exciting rewards is the natural life that has come into the garden," says Horton. In summer, monarch butterflies arrive in full force to feast on milkweed. "You can't go a day without seeing one," says Donivee. And while the Nashes entertain outdoors frequently—hosting cocktail parties and garden tours—Donivee's favorite time "is just sitting in the garden," she says. "It is one of my greatest pleasures."

NO.3

BE CLIMATE-CONSCIOUS

Horton recommends growing regionally appropriate plants: those that are native to your area or have similar growing requirements to those of natives, and that will thrive on natural rainfall. At the Nashes', she planted the drought-tolerant succulent *Calandrinia spectabilis*, which can bloom profusely from spring through fall, alongside a low, wide clipped hedge of the Australian native *Westringia fruticosa*.



CONSIDER GRAVEL

A classic design element in France and Italy, gravel occurs naturally and provides good drainage for plants while suppressing weeds. Horton used pea gravel as the base for a formal grid of four olive trees. As a focal point, she placed an armillary sphere in the middle and surrounded it with spring-blooming bearded irises. In the foreground, Spanish lavender complements them; a hedge of westringia provides a clean backdrop.



NO.5

PLANT TREES

"While trees need regular water initially, they are far less thirsty than a lawn and don't need much water once established," says Horton. Plus, they create cool, shady areas, which helps with water needs in the long term. Horton added more than 20 trees to the Nashes' garden, including California sycamores, olives, and birch trees, shown here. To complement the white bark of the birches, she underplanted them with the Japanese anemone 'Honorine Jobert,' which blooms in fall.

Produced by
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WATER-WISE AND WONDERFUL

"An important lesson is to garden where you live," says Horton, who strives to use only plants that will thrive where she's designing. Knowing your growing conditions will help you select the right plants. Lucky for you, there's a wide range of low-water plants available in all regions of the country, for every style of garden. These tough beauties should be able to handle some drought with aplomb.

MULLEIN

Providing a strong vertical accent to a garden bed, this Mediterranean self-seeder prefers full sun and will grow in dry, rocky soils. The cultivar 'Southern Charm,' below, can reach three feet in height and should produce blooms from late spring through early summer.



ERYNGIUM

Also known as sea holly, this low-maintenance perennial thrives in hot, dry areas. Its thistlelike foliage (the silvery-blue bracts resemble petals) and flowers (the center cones) should keep their shape through fall.



THYME

With fragrant foliage and pale-purple flowers in summer, this culinary herb can handle some foot traffic and provide a soft ground cover in a tapestry garden. It prefers well-drained soil and is hardy to Zone 5.



HENS AND CHICKS

These low-growing succulents feature compact rosettes of leaves and require very little maintenance.

Hardy to Zone 4, they do well both in pots and in the landscape (even in poor soil), where they will propagate freely by runners.



GAURA

Native to the southern U.S., this deer-resistant and sun-loving perennial will attract butterflies to its wispy spikes of white summer flowers. While it can handle some humidity, gaura does best in sandy, well-drained soil.



CATMINT

Fuss-free and strong, catmint (or nepeta) is a member of the mint family and features fragrant foliage and long-lasting flowers. The popular purple-flowered cultivar 'Walker's Low' is especially hardy, tolerating the toughest of growing conditions.



ARTEMISIA

Deer- and rabbit-tolerant, this woody shrub is grown for its unusual fine-textured, silvery foliage. A beautiful bedding plant, artemisia likes full sun and looks radiant in a moon garden.



AGASTACHE

Attractive to pollinators, agastache (or hummingbird mint) is a showy perennial herb that has many cultivars and flower colors, including pink, orange, red, and purple. Once established, these deer-resistant plants prefer deep but infrequent watering.