



1711 King Street • Santa Cruz, California 95060  
www.pwlandscapedesign.com • pwalters@pwlandscapedesign.com  
831-458-1307 fax • 831-458-1305 phone

## **Water Wise Landscapes**

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Even though it seemed they would never end, the rains have subsided for the year. We are entering our typical dry summer months. Now's a great time to assess your garden and consider making some modifications that will save water -- and save you on your water bill.

Number one on the list to making your garden water wise is "lose the lawn." Lawns are great if you have kids and pets, but grass is a water gulper. You should make your little spot of green as small as it can be to still meet your needs. Certainly consider replacing most or all of your front lawn with curb-appeal planting beds; very few families play in their front yards. And if you haven't already, take a look at replacing your thirsty bluegrass with some of the newer types of grasses that require less water.

The second step in creating your water wise landscape is installing a drip sprinkler system. Except for in a lawn or other ground cover area, your sprinklers serve you better if they drip rather than spray. Overhead spray uses a lot of extra water and is inefficient in planting beds, where some plants get too much and others too little water. Fortunately, there are kits for converting overhead sprinklers to drip, so you don't have to pull everything up and start over.

The third step is landscaping with water-conserving plants. More and more beautiful "drought-tolerant" plant materials are in the nurseries every year. You don't have to plant cactus! The East Bay Municipal Utility District has put out a gorgeous color book, *Plants and Landscapes for Summer-Dry Climates*, with hundreds of water wise plant descriptions, pictures and landscape ideas. You can order the book online (or find local bookstores who carry it) at the East Bay "MUD" site: [www.ebmud.com](http://www.ebmud.com).

Finally, don't forget to top off your water-conserving efforts with a 2-3" layer of mulch. Nitrogenized redwood mulch or a 50-50 blend of the mulch with chicken manure will not only curtail water evaporation it will also keep the weeds at bay, fertilize your garden and improve your soil's texture over time.