

**“WaterSmart Landscape Lab”  
Pilot Program Summary Report**

**San Diego County Water Authority**

**October 7, 2013**

## Overview

This report provides highlights from the completion of the WaterSmart Landscape Lab project, which was made possible in part by a \$15,000 grant from the Hans and Margaret Doe Charitable Trust. Originally named the “WaterSmart Landscape Lab” project, it later became known as the “WaterSmart Landscape Makeover Workshops.” This unique educational project was developed in response to requests received from North County Water Agencies’ Conservation Coordinators, who desired more in-depth coverage of the latest landscape principles and a “hands-on” instructional format for their customers.

Initially, the program vision included establishing a permanent teaching venue to be located at SDG&E’s new Energy Innovations Center. However, the costs associated with customizing a dedicated teaching space proved to be prohibitive, leading SDG&E to withdraw from the project. This prompted the Water Authority to recruit a new partner, San Diego Botanic Garden, whose Ecke Building served as the main teaching venue.

The overall project objective was to empower the typical homeowner to undertake a landscape renovation project (turf conversion) to WaterSmart Landscape standards. To that end, the Project engaged faculty from Mira Costa College’s Horticulture Department to develop three new teaching modules: “Toss the Turf,” “Pick Your Plants,” and “Intelligent Irrigation.” Mira Costa also managed the recruitment, training and work assignments with all instructors and design coaches.

San Diego Botanic Garden (SDBG) served as the lead agency for implementation. SDBG appointed a staff member to serve as Project Coordinator. SDBG’s duties included project marketing and participant enrollment; communications with participants; coordination of logistics with project staff (sponsors, instructors, exhibitors, etc.); and day-to-day administrative duties (reporting, invoicing, etc.).

From Spring 2012 through Spring 2013, four workshop series were held. Initially, each series consisted of 5 separate classes held on Saturday mornings over a two-month period. With guidance from a Project Advisory Committee (PAC), consisting of Water Authority member agency representatives, Mira Costa College staff twice revised the program curriculum to improve and streamline instruction, ultimately compressing the curriculum into a more cost-effective 4-class format.



A total of 82 homeowners from 16 of the Water Authority’s 24 member agencies enrolled in the four series, exceeding our average 20 participants per series target. The Project successfully met its objectives and achieved a remarkable geographic diversity among participants.

## Program Highlights

### **1. *Develop a new WaterSmart Landscape educational program that is consistent with the Water Authority's long-term market transformation strategy for water conservation.***

Water efficiency in the landscape sector is considered the “new frontier” in urban water conservation. It is estimated that outdoor water use accounts for 55% of our region’s consumption. About half of the applied water (irrigation) is thought to be wasted due to inefficient design, equipment, and practices. While the potential savings associated with this sector are very significant, they are not easily tapped. Realizing water savings from landscape upgrades is a complex undertaking. The WaterSmart Landscape Lab Series was conceived to be the ideal complement to our award-winning “A Homeowner’s Guide to a WaterSmart Landscape.” Together, the guide and the classes provide a strong educational foundation for promoting WaterSmart Landscapes. The principal aim of these resources is to empower participants to undertake a landscape upgrade project successfully.



### **2. *Why Develop New WaterSmart Workshops?***

Utilities have sponsored customer outreach and education programs for a long time. Typical outdoor water conservation classes have been delivered in a passive format where instructors rely on PowerPoint presentations to “talk at people.” While such classes help to promote awareness of water issues, they have not proven very effective in causing participants to implement change. As requested by conservation representatives from North County Water Agencies, the Water Authority set out to develop a more effective educational program that would provide participants a “hands-on” experience. In 2009-2010, when the Water Authority launched its pilot turf replacement rebate program, we closely monitored participants’ activities to identify barriers to implementation. The pilot program helped us pinpoint the typical challenges homeowners face when undertaking a landscape makeover project. The following is a list of the measures most likely to help a customer successfully implement a landscape conversion project:

- a) Clear guidelines to tell them what to do (Homeowner’s Guide)
- b) Assistance in developing and communicating a project vision (WSL Workshops)
- c) Feedback to validate and refine conceptual landscape design projects (Design Coaching)

In response to these needs, the Water Authority has developed a suite of resources to assist customers. These resources include: the Homeowner’s Guide, the Makeover Workshop Series, and supplemental coaching and technical assistance.

**3. Outline of the WaterSmart Landscape Makeover Series (the final format for the Series consists of four consecutive workshops)**

1. Toss the Turf: Introduction to basic concepts of landscape design, including turf removal.
2. Pick your Plants: Introduction to climate appropriate plants. Planting plan design.
3. Intelligent Irrigation: Introduction to water-efficient irrigation technologies. Irrigation plan design.
4. Design Coaching: One-on-one consultation with landscape design professionals to help critique and improve students' plans.

**4. Assembling a Winning Team**

The successful implementation of this program was possible thanks to the contributions of several parties. The Water Authority developed the program scope and provided ongoing management and support. The Hans and Margaret Doe Charitable Trust provided invaluable seed funding in the form of a \$15,000 grant to get this initiative started. The San Diego Botanic Garden (SDBG), located in the City of Encinitas, agreed to serve as the project implementation lead. SDBG designated a staff member to serve as the Project Coordinator, and applied its considerable expertise to organizing, hosting and facilitating the workshops on an ongoing basis. Mira Costa Community College (MCCC) served as the project lead for curriculum development and instruction. Two faculty members from MCCC's Horticulture Department framed the initial curriculum and implemented several improvements throughout the pilot period. They also recruited and trained the Program's instructors and coaches. Water Authority member agency representatives provided periodic suggestions on program refinements and helped to promote participation by water customers.



**5. Strong Interest and Diverse Participation**

A total of 82 participants enrolled in the pilot program's four series. Each series consisted of 4 or 5 consecutive workshops, as outlined in item 3 above. Workshop participants hailed from the following 16 member agencies.

- City of Carlsbad (6)
- City of Escondido (2)
- City of Oceanside (7)
- City of Poway (3)
- City of San Diego (15)
- Helix Water District (2)
- Lakeside Water District (2)
- Olivenhain MWD (20)
- Otay Water District (1)
- Padre Dam MWD (1)
- Rincon del Diablo MWD (1)
- San Dieguito Water District (8)
- Santa Fe Irrigation District (4)
- Sweetwater Authority (1)
- Vallecitos Water District (5)
- Vista ID (4)

## **6. Administrative Highlights**

- ✓ Secured a teaching venue
- ✓ Developed program curriculum
- ✓ Recruited and trained instructors and coaches
- ✓ Successfully recruited participants
- ✓ Piloted the initial curriculum
- ✓ Streamlined workshop series format from 5 to 4 workshops
- ✓ Developed instructional materials and handouts
- ✓ Developed hands-on lab activities
- ✓ Assigned homework
- ✓ Established a borrowing library of reference books
- ✓ Facilitated one-on-one professional consultations
- ✓ Helped participants produce actionable landscape plans

## **7. Project Outcomes**

The ultimate objective of the project was to empower participants to take action upgrading their landscapes. All participants were encouraged to develop final landscape designs, copies of which were collected as a final project. Samples of project content and final projects are included in as an attachment. The program achieved a high level of customer satisfaction, consistently generating positive feedback from participants by means of anonymous surveys. Based on our review of final plans and other anecdotal information, we were able to assess participants' readiness to implement a WaterSmart Landscape project. Based on these results, we have grouped participants in four equally-sized categories:

- Group A: Highly proficient and ready to implement their project at the end of the program
- Group B\*: Motivated, but require more organization and assistance to finalize their plans
- Group C: Committed to concept, but vision for project is not yet clear
- Group D: May help promote by word-of-mouth and may apply concepts selectively on small scale.

*\* Development of a program workbook would be of great assistance to Group B in better preparing them for project implementation*

## **8. Future Outlook**

Thanks to the support of the Hans & Margaret Doe Charitable Trust and the success of the pilot phase of the program, the Water Authority has been able to secure a major grant from the State of California to expand and enhance the availability of these workshops throughout our service area.

16 new series are planned through May 2015, made possible by a \$165,000 grant from the Department of Water Resources. Expanded regional coverage will include workshops in the north, central, and south portions of San Diego County. The Water Authority will also be seeking additional grant funding to undertake the development of a new companion lab workbook to support this class.

## **9. Acknowledgements**

### WaterSmart Landscape Lab Workshops Project Team

<i>Program Management</i>	San Diego County Water Authority Carlos Michelon, Principal Water Resources Specialist
<i>Funding Partner</i>	Hans & Margaret Doe Charitable Trust
<i>Implementation Partners</i>	San Diego Botanic Garden Pat Hammer, Director of Operations Michelle Kinney, Project Coordinator  Mira Costa Community College Claire Ehrlinger, Instruction and Coaching Resources Megan Allison, Curriculum Development
<i>Project Advisory Committee</i>	JoEllen Jacoby, City of San Diego, Public Utilities Brent Reyes, Vista Irrigation District Teresa Chase, Olivenhain MWD
<i>Instructors and Design Coaches</i>	Sharon May, Senior Design Consultant Steven Sherman, Landscape Architect Jennifer Montgomery, Landscape Architect Jeremy Sison, Landscape Architect Katie Seidenwurm, Landscape Architect Amy Hoffman, Landscape Architect Rajan Brown, Landscape Architect Christiane Holmquist, Landscape Designer Diane Downey, Landscape Designer

## **Attachments**

- Attachment – Sample Flier





BEFORE



AFTER



### How to Apply

Please download an application from <http://www.sdbgarden.org/classes.htm>

Complete and submit application by email to [mkinney@sdbgarden.org](mailto:mkinney@sdbgarden.org) or by FAX at (760) 632-0917

Applications will be reviewed on a **first-come, first-serve** basis. Some conditions apply. For more information

**San Diego Botanic Garden**  
**(760) 436-3036 ext. 206**

**Apply today.**  
**Participation is limited.**  
**It's free.**



Program brought to you by the **San Diego County Water Authority** and its **24 member agencies**

Developed by



Made possible by

**The Hans and Margaret Doe Charitable Trust**

# Want a Beautiful Water-saving Landscape?

**FREE**

## Landscape Makeover Workshop Series

Now accepting applications  
Next series begins **May 18, 2013**  
at the San Diego Botanic Garden

March 2013



BEFORE



AFTER



## WaterSmart Landscape Makeover Workshop Series

This workshop series is designed to provide homeowners a comprehensive overview and the basic hands-on skills necessary to makeover a traditional turf yard into a beautiful and climate-appropriate WaterSmart showcase. The series consists of three workshops and a professional landscape design coaching session that will teach participants how to transform their yards.

**Participants will also receive a pre-workshop professional site visit and customized project base plan.**

Valued at more than \$250, this workshop series is FREE for selected participants. Space is limited and qualified applicants will be enrolled in a first-come, first-serve basis.



### Step 1: Toss The Turf

✓ May 18, 2013, 9 a.m. - 12 p.m.  
Site analysis and turf removal

### Step 2: Pick Your Plants

✓ June 1, 2013, 9 a.m. - 12 p.m.  
Planning, plant selection and design

### Step 3: Intelligent Irrigation

✓ June 8, 2013, 9 a.m. - noon  
Smart irrigation system components and installation

### Design Coaching Session

June 15, 2013, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.  
Specific appointment times TBD.  
Free consultations on your planting plan and irrigation plan with design professionals

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### Eligibility Criteria

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Homeowners interested in learning WaterSmart landscape principles and who meet the following criteria are encouraged to apply:

1. Single-family residential homeowner (owner occupied);
2. Working, in-ground irrigation system;
3. Commitment and financial ability to make over one irrigated section of turf to low-water-use plants (either Do-It-Yourself or professional);
4. Commitment to attend three classroom sessions and one coaching session. Must attend all sessions.

All classes will be held at the San Diego Botanic Garden in Encinitas.



## WaterSmart Landscape Makeover Workshop Series – Application for Participation



### Applicant Information

Name of Homeowner/Participant:

Project address: Street

City

State

Zip code

Daytime phone:

E-mail:

Do you live in a neighborhood with a Homeowner Association? Yes No

Which water agency serves your property?

### Eligibility Criteria

Homeowners who meet the following criteria are encouraged to apply.  
Please check all applicable items and sign below.

I am a single-family homeowner and live at the project address.

I commit to replacing one irrigated section of turf grass with low-water-use plants after the program, either on my own or by hiring a professional.

The turf area to be replaced has a working, in-ground irrigation system.

I will attend all sessions for the Spring 2013 series: May 18, June 1, June 8, June 15.

*Applications will be considered on a first-come, first-served basis. Selection of participants is at the discretion of sponsoring water utilities. Applicants are not guaranteed a space in the class.*

Signature

Date

### **Submit application to:**

San Diego Botanic Garden, Attention: Michelle Kinney  
Fax: (760) 632-0917 Email: [mkinney@sdbgarden.org](mailto:mkinney@sdbgarden.org)