

A WATERWISE SOUTHLAND GARDEN

By Jenny Green

Flowering beauties that thrive in drought

Despite the occasional deluge, seasonal rains have not put an end to L.A. drought, and home-owning gardeners will increasingly contend with watering quotas and mounting water bills.

Fortunately the county is still offering compensation to those willing to remove their lawns. L.A.'s Landscape Incentive Program, offered by the Department of Water and Power, offers \$2 per square foot of grass removed. Rebates are also available for installed water-efficient landscape equipment, such as irrigation controllers and rotating sprinkler nozzles, so gardeners can combine drought-tolerant plants, mulches and smart irrigation techniques to create gardens that stay beautiful year-round.

In addition to the economic (and labor-saving) benefit, reducing the amount of water we use on gardens helps prevent hidden environmental costs, including land degradation, habitat loss and pollution. The Colorado River, source of much of the water used by metropolitan Los Angeles, suffers increasing salt levels, partly due to water evaporating from reservoir surfaces.

So, how to get started on creating a waterwise garden? Kim Eierman, CH, AOLCP, of www.ecobeneficial.com stresses, "The most important step is to lose your lawn. With their shallow root systems, turf grasses are always thirsty and require vast amounts of watering, especially in hot, dry climates."

But even drought-tolerant plants need water while they establish, Kim points out. "While native plants are inherently 'low maintenance,' they are not 'no maintenance.' Any newly planted plants, even native ones, will require irrigation in the first year or two after planting." A drip system on a timer will deliver water directly to plants, reducing wastage and labor. Spread a two-inch layer of shredded bark or another mulch between plants to conserve soil moisture.

Another water-saving device to think about next year is a

barrel to capture runoff from your roof. A diverter on a downpipe captures rainwater until the barrel is full, then directs excess water down the drain.



Ready to start planting?

Eierman suggests these plants when creating your waterwise garden:

Hollyleaf cherry (*Prunus ilicifolia*) is an evergreen shrub that will reach 10 to 30 feet. Clusters of white flowers appear in March—a valuable source of nectar for native pollinators. Dark purple or black fruits follow and are relished by fruit-eating birds. The fruits are edible, but don't eat the pits, as they have toxins.

A number of **manzanitas** are native to Southern California. They provide nectar to bees, butterflies and other pollinators, and are very resistant to drought. Gray-green leaves on the midsized Eastwood's manzanita (*Arctostaphylos glandulosa*) serve as a backdrop to white or pinkish flowers that bloom in late winter or early spring. Birds like the reddish-brown berries that follow.

Ceanothus are drought-tolerant native shrubs. The evergreen buckbrush (*Ceanothus cuneatus*) shows clusters of fragrant flowers in spring, either white or tinged blue or purple. At maturity, the plant reaches 5 to 10 feet in height. Expect to see lots of butterflies and native bees on any *Ceanothus*.

Two perennials suitable for a waterwise garden are **wishbone bush** (*Mirabilis californica*), a subshrub that bears rose-pink flowers; and **canyon sunflower** (*Venegasia carpesioides*), which features two-inch yellow sunflowers. **Deer grass** (*Muhlenbergia rigens*) is a tall native evergreen grass that provides arching clumps of foliage and doesn't need mowing.

This is just a starter list. The Las Virgenes Municipal Water District website (www.lvmwd.com) lists literally hundreds of waterwise options, divided into helpful sections such as Attracts Birds or Under Oak Trees, Fire Resistant or Fragrant.

