HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATIONS

LESS LAWN MORE VALUE

Embracing Lawn Transformation While Preserving the Suburban Forest

California Flannel Bush *Fremontodendron spp., California native*

Project Snapshot

Countrywood HOA

LOCATION: Walnut Creek, Contra Costa County

LEAD ENTITY: Countrywood Homeowners Association

SUPPORT: Contra Costa Water District with design assistance from Kelly Marshall Garden Design

CONTRA COSTA WATER DISTRICT

Project Overview

Built in 1973, Countrywood is a planned community of 299 townhomes in Walnut Creek. The 42-acre East Bay site is studded with more than 1,000 trees, including many coastal redwoods, that had been surrounded by lawn.

Spurred by drought and rising water and maintenance costs, the HOA decided to utilize rebates offered by the Contra Costa Water District. Following guidelines for lawn removal, conversion to drip irrigation, and planting water-wise perennials and shrubs, the HOA's Landscape Committee worked with a landscape consultant to successfully achieve the project's goals.

Over six years, Countrywood HOA transformed about three acres of nonfunctional lawn into beautiful, flower-filled water-wise landscaping while preserving their suburban forest. What was once a monotone turf landscape is now a vibrant tapestry of flowering native plants and trees, installed in phases, focused on the community's perimeter plantings. Following professional design consultation, Countrywood's on-site landscape staff implemented lawn removal, irrigation conversion, and planting the new landscaped areas.

"The conversion around the total perimeter of the property, plus some interior areas, was completed in phases over a number of years. Patience, patience, patience was the word of the day! ... We ended up with beautiful landscaping and a showplace for all to enjoy when driving by our grounds."

Sharon Winning
Past Landscape Committee Chairman and Board Member, Countrywood HOA

BEFORE

AFTER: *5 years after installation*

Garden Features

Includes mostly water-wise flowering shrubs, with many California natives supporting native birds, butterflies, and bees. The plant palette features lots of California Lilacs (Ceanothus), Manzanitas, Coffeeberry, and Currants. Contributing spiky accents are Mat Rushes (Lomandra) and New Zeland Flax (Phormium). Organic mulch feeds the soil and maintains moisture.

Project Highlights

PROJECT FEATURE	DETAIL
Lawn Removed	About 130,000 square feet of nonfunctional lawn transformed
Plant Palette	Many California natives plus water-wise plants from other Mediterranean climates, adding seasonal color and texture while attracting pollinators
Landscape Features	Updated perimeter plantings, revitalizing the community's public face; preserved and improved the irrigation for more than 1,000 mature trees
Project Timeline	Completed in phases, starting in 2017
Installation Approach	Professionally designed. Installed and maintained by on-site landscape staff
Project Cost	~$4 per square foot
Funding Sources	HOA dues (labor covered through the annual budget), reserves set aside over several years for plants and irrigation, and a $25,000 rebate from Contra Costa Water District
Community Benefits	Colorful attractive landscapes, enhanced ecological value, inviting green spaces, and, of course, water savings; lower costs help HOA dues
Return on Investment	Lawn transformation is saving 36 hours of maintenance per week; HOA reduced chemical fertilizer and pesticide use by more than 1,200 pounds a year

Get Started in Your Community

1. Evaluate your landscape and how space is used.
2. Consider maintenance costs as well as water use.
3. Learn about funding from your water agency and other programs, including restrictions.
4. Try out ideas in test projects, then graduate to larger makeovers.
5. Engage the community through education and events.

Tips for Other HOAs

Change Takes Time: Approach projects thoughtfully. Planning time pays off with long-lasting results. Water-wise plants need time to put down roots and become established. Remember: Patience, patience, patience.

Start Small, Start Early: Figure out the sticking points through proof of concept with smaller projects first to guarantee success on the larger projects and to avoid costly mistakes. Plus, this helps to show community members that it can be done and be beautiful!

Pay Attention to Trees: Mature trees are a landscape's most valuable asset. They took decades to grow—and take decades to replace. Give former "lawn trees" extra irrigation as they transition to water-wise surroundings. Value their shade.

Put Your New Face Forward: Concentrate lawn transformation efforts in public areas, so your community can see and enjoy your progress.

CALIFORNIA WATER EFFICIENCY PARTNERSHIP

NonFunctionalTurfCA.org