# LESS LAWN MORE INSPIRATION

## Turning Nonfunctional Lawn Into Spaces for Play, Learning, and Community

**Narrowleaf Milkweed,** *Asclepias fascicularis*, California Native

## Project Snapshot

### La Tercera Park

LOCATION: Petaluma, Sonoma County

WATER UTILITY: City of Petaluma

LEAD ENTITY: City of Petaluma and Daily Acts Land Resilience Partnership Program

SUPPORT: Sonoma Resource Conservation District, Conservation Corps North Bay, Watershed Progressive, Releaf Petaluma, Schaefer Engineering, Permaculture Artisans, The Water Folk, Angelia Rossi

## Project Overview

La Tercera Park in Petaluma was identified as an ideal candidate for the Daily Acts Land Resilience Partnership Program, a community-based partnership model developed by Watershed Progressive to support landscape transformation and installations, because it had nonfunctional lawn and environmental concerns such as flooding issues.

A community engagement session to get feedback from people who frequent the park was held in addition to professional design and planning, with installation support from dozens of volunteers and Conservation Corps North Bay. Over 12,000 square feet of nonfunctional lawn prone to flooding were converted into a beautiful garden filled with low-water use plants that create habitat. A large rain garden was added to manage seasonal stormwater, recharging the ground with almost 10,000 gallons of rainwater annually. Exploration is encouraged in the public park with an added natural meandering path.

***"The feedback from neighbors and park users has been overwhelmingly positive. This garden invites connection, curiosity and interaction with the natural world."***

**Emily Nodal**
Senior Programs Coordinator at Daily Acts

**BEFORE**

**AFTER:** *1.5 YEARS AFTER INSTALLATION*

## Garden Features

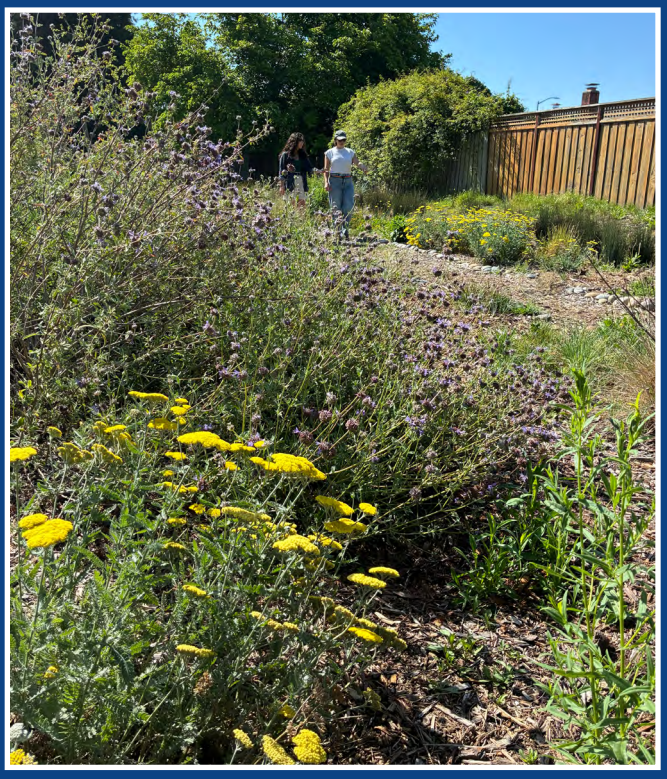
A rain garden slows, sinks and spreads seasonal storm runoff back into the soil for use by plants such as California rush, carex, fescue, and currants to help mitigate flooding issues. Plants with a diverse array of textures, aromas and colors increase biodiversity and support habitat, while also adding seasonal interest to the garden. Pollinator-friendly perennials include sage, yarrow, and California native milkweed. Trees like native oaks, toyon and redbuds will fill in over time to add shade.

## Project Highlights

| PROJECT FEATURE | DETAIL |
|---|---|
| **Lawn Removed** | 12,160 square feet of nonfunctional lawn sheet-mulched. |
| **Plant Palette** | California native and drought-tolerant species plus rain garden plants. |
| **Landscape Features** | Permeable walking path that invites connection, pollinator supporting plants, California native trees, a rain garden that recharges almost 10,000 gallons of water into landscape annually. |
| **Irrigation System** | Replaced conventional spray irrigation system with high-efficiency drip irrigation system. |
| **Water Savings** | Over 207,000 gallons of water saved annually the first year after lawn conversion. Additional savings expected once plants are established. |
| **Project Timeline** | Hosted community listening session in August 2024, sheet mulching and landscape transformation began in Dec. 2024 with professional help and over 50 volunteers. |
| **Installation Approach** | Professionally designed and installed with support from volunteers. A rain garden was installed, and the lawn was sheet-mulched prior to planting. |
| **Funding Sources** | Petaluma Mulch Madness Program, CA Department of Water Resources Grant. |
| **Community Benefits** | Added seasonal interest, shade and pollinator habitat, stormwater management. |
| **Return on Investment** | Much lower maintenance as well as lower water use, reduced flooding and stormwater runoff. |

## Get Started at Your Local Public Site

1. Integrate lawn conversion into capital planning or sustainability efforts.
2. Identify publicly visible lawn areas with no recreational use to showcase.
3. Explore funding from your water agency or state programs, and consider creative fundraising and promotion.
4. Partner with local gardening groups, nonprofits, and schools.
5. Engage the community through education and events, and identify passionate, dedicated volunteers and other agency partners.
6. Decide early who will manage the irrigation controller, and provide training so volunteers and staff understand how to operate and maintain the system.



SONOMA - MARIN SAVING WATER PARTNERSHIP

SavingWaterPartnership.org

CALIFORNIA WATER EFFICIENCY PARTNERSHIP

NonFunctionalTurfCA.org