LESS LAWN MORE LEARNING

From Mowing to Growing: Turning Unused Lawn Into an Edible Garden that Teaches

Yarrow, *Achillea millefolium,* California native

Project Snapshot

Petaluma Regional Library

LOCATION: Petaluma, Sonoma County

WATER UTILITY: City of Petaluma

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

SUPPORT: Cagwin & Dorward, Community volunteers

Project Overview

The Living Learning Landscape demonstration garden is located behind the Petaluma Regional Library. The Daily Acts Land Resilience Partnership Program, developed by Watershed Progressive, partnered with the Library and the City of Petaluma to transform a portion of unused lawn into a vibrant, water smart garden that also grows food, habitat and community.

Installed through a series of hands-on events and hundreds of volunteers coming together, the Living Learning Landscape is designed to be a space for the community to gather and learn. People are encouraged to harvest fruit from the garden, and a Story Walk provided by the library and educational signage invites interaction with the garden. Benches under the shade of a fruiting mulberry tree provide a shaded space to relax and read.

"Every time I'm in this landscape and I'm engaging with community members, folks are slowing down, smelling the flowers, and you'll always see somebody with a smile and usually a basket full of fruit."

Liz Platte-Bermeo
Programs Manager at Daily Acts

BEFORE

Photograph by Daily Acts

AFTER: *8 YEARS AFTER INSTALLATION*

Garden Features

After the transformation, distinct spaces showcase drought tolerant edible trees and shrubs (such as pomegranate, mulberry, fig, goumi, and persimmon); pollinator-friendly perennials (such as lavender, sages, yarrow, penstemon and California fuchsia); and a rain garden. Permeable paths with statuary, signage and benches invite exploration and engagement with the garden.

Project Highlights

PROJECT FEATURE	DETAIL
Lawn Removed	8,100 sq. ft. of nonfunctional lawn replaced.
Plant Palette	Drought tolerant edible shrubs and trees, California natives, pollinator-friendly perennials. Over 10 kinds of edible plants added including Fuyu persimmon, Kadota fig, Pakistan mulberry, pineapple guava, pomegranate, goumi berry, rosemary and lavender.
Landscape Features	Rain garden, fruit trees and shrubs, drought tolerant pollinator plants, permeable walking paths, statuary, benches, Story Walk and educational signage.
Project Timeline	Manual weed removal began in the summer of 2017 and the site was then sheet mulched in October 2017, 5 months prior to starting planting. Drip irrigation and plants were installed over a series of volunteer events. Monthly volunteer days are held to maintain the garden via weeding and pruning.
Irrigation System	Replaced conventional spray irrigation system with high-efficiency drip irrigation system.
Water Savings	Over 118,000 gallons of water saved annually.
Funding Sources	City of Petaluma Water Department and Mulch Madness Program.
Community Benefits	Public events and educational signage. Community gathering space and added shade. Fruit available for public to harvest. Added pollinator habitat.
Return on Investment	Much lower maintenance as well as lower water use.

Get Started at Your Local Public Site

1. Identify underused lawns and consider redesigning them as classrooms, gathering areas or other spaces that serve community needs.
2. Engage stakeholders early to build support for the project.
3. Explore funding from your water agency or state programs.
4. Partner with local gardening groups, nonprofits, and schools.
5. Involve the community through education and events.

SONOMA - MARIN SAVING WATER PARTNERSHIP

SavingWaterPartnership.org

CALIFORNIA WATER EFFICIENCY PARTNERSHIP

NonFunctionalTurfCA.org