

Garden Wise TV Episode 12: Mulch it, Plant It, Grow It: How to Create a Water Wise Landscape (29:16)

This winter's rain has offered little relief for the dry lawns across the county. This episode is full of ideas of what to do with that dying lawn and get your landscape looking better than ever! Do you even need a lawn? Here to help with this decision is local landscape architect and educator, Billy Goodnick, in a new series called *Water Wise, Dollar Wise Landscapes*.



Homeowners, Stacy and Fred, have come to speak with Billy about how they can get their dead lawn looking like their neighbors' beautiful landscapes. They consult the 'Lawn Decision Tree' to decide on how much lawn, if any, they want to keep. Based on quality, size, location, and best practices, they decide to keep some of the back lawn, and get rid of the front lawn. One option for the front yard is just to make it beautiful. Creating a high point a little ways back allows for some of the garden to focus out to the street and the other side will be a garden looking into your house.

Next, we learn about a local organization that's helping residents start the process of replacing their lawn. Brad Smith started Youth Drought Project in collaboration with Sweetwater Collaborative. This program is aimed at hiring high school and college students to help residents eliminate their lawns through sheet mulching. In addition to providing jobs, Youth Drought Project is educating them about



water conservation. Other methods for lawn removal include using chemicals or black plastic, or manually removing; but the most effective way is sheet mulching. The first step is to cover the grass with some type of sheeting material, typically cardboard. Next, cover it with a thick layer of mulch. Lastly, monitor it and immediately remove any grass that sprouts up.

One of the most important aspects to having a thriving, water wise garden is to have healthy soil. David White will teach us what it takes to build and maintain vibrant soil biology. Plants take in CO₂ from the air and release sugars around the roots, which feeds the biology that brings things to the roots. Without this biology around the roots, you won't have as healthy plants. Perennials need fungus in the soil; therefore, put woodchips on top of the soil, a fungal food. Annuals, need bacteria in the soil; therefore put straw and mulch, a bacterial food. To protect the soil biology, you should never have bare soil. A good way to support soil health is through crop covering, woodchip or straw covering, and composting. Good compost smells like forest floor and should also be moist. The Center for Regenerative Agriculture based in Ojai has a website with information on soil food webs, worm bins, and days for free-soil testing workshops.



Now that you've learned how to remove your lawn and create healthy soil, you are ready to start planting. Oscar Carmona, an instructor for the County's Green Gardner Program, will talk about the right plant in the right place. First, we need to understand the microclimate in the landscape. A microclimate is a unique area of your garden that it is distinct its condition from others. All plants still need light, favorable temperature ranges, proper space to grow, good soil conditions, and water. We can apply these concepts to the different microclimates of a site. Start by looking at the structure, and then consider the orientation of each side of the building to the sun and the shading effect of large trees on the plants below it. Secondly, pay attention to the information on pot tags when you pick your plants from a nursery. A common mistake is planting right next to a structure and not leaving the plant room to grow; always leave space for plants to grow to maturity. If you don't have access to the pot tag, you can consult the "Western Garden Book" or visit WaterWiseSB.org. Finally, understand that plants access water in the root zone. Using a soil probe, you can test the moisture of the soil in the root zone.



As our host Becky Davis says "remember you are the agent of change, and together we can conserve water and create beautiful climate appropriate gardens." In this episode we learned how to remove our dead lawn, create healthy soil, and where to plant. Visit WaterWiseSB.org for more tips and past episodes!

