

SDHS 2011 SAN DIEGO COUNTY FAIR EXHIBIT

Let Your Water Budget Drive Your Plant Choices

The SDHS display garden in the Paul Ecke Jr. Flower and Garden Show at the San Diego County Fair has always been an award winner, and this year was no exception. Our beautiful landscape won four awards (see page 3), a tribute to the creative efforts of the designers and the hard work of many volunteers. The name of our garden, *Let Your Water Budget Drive Your Plant Choices*, tells you a lot about what we think is important in earth-friendly – and delightful – gardens. We partnered this year with the San Diego County Water Authority to educate the public on WaterSmart plants in a display featuring exciting design plus sustainable features for home landscapes. A video of our garden and more info is available at sdcwa.org (under the Recent News heading click on Garden Exhibit at Fair Wins Three Awards).

Our colorful and sustainable garden showcases a variety of water-thrifty plants and garden features that allow the average homeowner on a modest budget to make the best use of rainfall and supplemental irrigation. This inviting and low-maintenance garden attracts beneficial insects and birds, provides a shady retreat and welcoming sitting areas, and has a whimsical charm in the small space typical of many urban homes. Here's the nitty-gritty on what we did – and why. For a list of the plants we used, turn to page 11.

Garden-Friendly Patio and Rocks:

Our 1000 square foot garden has 530 square feet of permeable hardscape, comprised of a patio of interlocking pavers set on sand, plus decomposed granite and rock. The patio is *permeable* because the pavers are set on sand (instead of in non-porous concrete), and therefore rainwater seeps directly into the soil through the sand instead of running off a solid concrete pad. The circular patio is sloped slightly towards an attractive seating/retaining wall with a low opening in it. Rainwater that isn't absorbed below the patio drains off through the opening into a handsome bioswale made of rocks of various sizes and planted with water-thrifty plants. The remaining water is retained in the soil below the bioswale, reducing the need for irrigating this area. Roots of nearby trees and shrubs grow beneath the bioswale area, allowing them to take advantage of the water and produce deep and vigorous root systems.

Mulch, Mulch, Mulch:

The other 470 square feet of the garden is well mulched using a combination of organic mulches, decomposed granite, gravel and rocks to prevent both excessive evaporation of water and heating of the soil. The organic mulch here is composed of wood chips, plant cuttings, and similar organic materials. As it breaks down it releases nutrients into the soil and increases the ability of the soil to absorb water. A 2" to 4" layer of mulch helps reduce your water bills while keeping weeds to a minimum (especially if you use a few sheets of newspaper or a layer of cardboard under the mulch).

Select Water-Thrifty Plants:

The planted area shown here has 30% of very low water use native plants and succulents, 64% of low water use trees and shrubs, and only 6% of high water plants (mostly in a small vegetable garden). Plants are grouped together by water needs to avoid excess watering.

All succulent plants are WaterSmart because they store water in their leaves, stems and/or roots. A huge variety of succulents are available, with foliage in every color of the rainbow from white to coral, gold, lime green, teal blue, and near-black – and everything in between! Succulent leaves can be narrow or broad, flat or bumpy, fuzzy or shiny, and with scalloped or smooth edges. Grown mostly for their leaves, which are usually evergreen, many succulents also have beautiful flowers that can decorate the plant for several months. The succulents have been arranged to show off the different textures, colors, contrasts and repetition that can be created with these versatile plants. One of these succulents, *Dudleya pulverulenta*, is native to San Diego County.

California friendly plants – including California natives and plants from other Mediterranean-climate areas similar to ours – usually need little water to thrive because they're well adapted to dry summers. Some do well with watering only once or twice a month during the summer and not at all during our winter rainy season. For most, a once-weekly watering in summer is sufficient. Many also need little, if any, supplemental fertilizer and some do best with none at all. The Monkey Flower and California Goldenrod are native to San Diego County.

Artful Recycling:

The artwork in our garden is also environmentally thoughtful. Our roadster sculpture is made entirely from recycled parts. A specially designed birdhouse encourages local birds to visit the garden. Instead of a single-purpose garden shed, our teardrop trailer is light enough to be pulled by a Smart Car (the owner does) and doubles as a garden retreat, saving on construction materials. The shelf in back of the trailer is used as a potting shed and for backyard tailgate parties. The wooden columns have been salvaged from another garden project. Similarly styled vintage chairs can be found at thrift stores and garage sales; they can easily be repainted to match your décor.

Get Inspired!

Our regular meetings attract about 350 people each month because of talented and enthusiastic speakers who share their hard-won garden knowledge – and their thoughtful insights – with eager listeners who want to keep on learning about gardening. If you have missed some of our speakers you can borrow videos of many past meetings from the Video Loan table at meetings. The garden had features inspired by *all* of our speakers since January 2010:

- Beautiful but Wicked! plants (Amy Stewart, January 2010)
- Low-water grasses (John Greenlee, February 2010)
- A vegetable patch (Pat Welsh, March 2010)
- Australian plants (Joe Walker, April 2010)
- Rainwater harvesting (Brad Lancaster, May 2010)
- Colorful succulents (Debra Lee Baldwin, July 2010)
- Favorite plants (Bruce & Sharon Asakawa, August 2010)
- California native Plants (Margaret Fillius, September 2010)
- Desert plants (Wendy Proud, October 2010)
- Mulch around plants (Soil Experts, November 2010)
- Plants to attract bees (James Nieh, December 2010)
- Functional garden art (Greg Corman, January 2011)
- Old fashioned favorites (Aenne Carver, February 2011)
- A soil-free living wall (Jim Mumford, March 2011)
- Pebble mosaic (Jeffrey Bale, April 2011)
- Inspiration and alchemy (Bob Perry, May 2011)

Thank You!!!

Three talented professional members generously donated a great deal of time and skill in making the garden possible: planning, designing, seeking out the best plants and materials, coordinating with suppliers, supervising volunteers, preparing artwork and specifications, and much more. Landscape designer and SDHS Vice President Jim Bishop will be our president starting in September (see www.bishopgardendesign.com). Landscape designer Marilyn Guidroz, was also the supervisor for an enthusiastic group of students from MiraCosta College (see www.marilynsgarden.com). Landscape designer Vero Boyer, who also produced the signs and plant labels, is a licensed architect in Mexico (see www.ecodesignsd.com).

Steve Hubert, of the San Diego County Water Authority, helped with the installation of the garden and prepared the exceptionally attractive (and useful) handout we provided to Fair goers. SDCWA staff members also assisted with signage, free literature, and training our Horticulturists of the Day. Learn more at www.SDCWA.org.

Our garden featured a whimsical 50's Roadster built entirely of recycled material by artist Rick

Hartner (www.SittingDuckStudio.com). This fabulous piece of garden art will be a highlight in the garden of Susan and Frank Oddo, who won it at our Silent Auction on June 13th.

Gary Vincent, whose Fallbrook garden (shared with his plant-loving wife, Wanda Mallen) was a highlight of our March garden tour, designed and made a stunning birdhouse for the garden. A very retro Teardrop Camper Trailer that doubled as a retreat was generously loaned to us by Little Guy Trailers (www.LittleGuyTrailers.net).

Eight students from the MiraCosta College Horticulture Department were a terrific asset in installing and maintaining the garden, and also helped with talking to people at the Fair about the garden. They were: Rachel Cox, Sophia Cwiklinski, Monica Ensign, Stephen Lague, Deborah Lockwood, Jake Minnick, Kati Moch, and Carmen Simpson. Other volunteers who helped before the Fair began include Carol Costarakis and Brian Taylor. Bill Nugent did a stellar job preparing a binder with a detailed information page and photo of every plant in the garden, which was very helpful in answering questions during the Fair.

Many thanks to these other supporters who generously assisted us with plants, materials, and furnishings:

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Southwest Boulder & Stone (www.SWBRock.com)

Susanna Pagan (www.SPGardens.com)

In the next newsletter we'll list the names of the Horticulturists of the Day, who talked to Fair attendees about our garden and the adjacent garden of the San Diego Botanic Garden. Their wholehearted participation helped us to fulfill our mission "to promote the enjoyment, art, knowledge and public awareness of horticulture in the San Diego area, while providing the opportunity for education and research."