

CLCA Positions on Landscape Water Management

Updated by the CLCA Board of Directors September 20, 2006.

- Water conservation, including landscape water conservation, must become a long-term priority in California for state and local public officials, landscape professionals, and the general public. *The California Water Plan Update*, Bulletin 160-05, makes it clear that water use efficiency must play a critical role in maintaining the state's future environmental health as well as its high standard of living. Bulletin 160-05 can be accessed by clicking on the following link:
http://www.water.ca.gov/nav.cfm?topic=Water_Use_and_Planning&subtopic=California_Water_Plan.
- Happily, Bulletin 160-05 also concludes that California can have a sustainable and reliable water supply in 2030 if the state uses water efficiently in the coming years. According to the report, Californians have made good progress in water use efficiency over the past few decades, demonstrating that an increase in population does not have to result in a proportionate increase in urban water use.
- The key to landscape water conservation is efficient irrigation management. *Urban CII Landscape Water Use and Efficiency in California*, a study prepared for the California Landscape Contractors Association by Dr. John B. Whitcomb, suggests that a conversion from turf to other irrigated plants will not necessarily result in lower water use given current water management practices. In other words, efficient water management is far more important than planting "politically correct" plants.
- All landscape development should be subject to the water budget approach, including detached single-family homes. Landscapes should be designed, installed, and maintained to meet a water budget.
- CLCA vigorously opposes the development of water ordinances that set arbitrary limits on turfgrass or limit landscapes to certain plants. Individuals must retain the right to decide for themselves how to conserve water, since there are many different ways to conserve on landscape watering.

- Landscape plants have an environmental impact and ecological value, including production of the oxygen we breathe, removal of many pollutants, amelioration of the heat island effect, as well as psychological and aesthetic benefits.
- Research and development of efficient irrigation technologies should continue. Appropriate irrigation design, installation, and management practices should be promoted.
- The water audit, a crucial irrigation practice that produces detailed information about actual system performance in the field, recommendations, and, where applicable, cost benefit analysis, should be performed on all irrigation systems by certified water auditors. Subsequent audits should be performed on irrigation systems that fail to meet a water budget of 80 percent of local reference evapotranspiration.
- New landscape water conservation technologies and practices will not achieve their potential unless owners are motivated economically to water efficiently. Unfortunately, current water pricing does not generally reflect the true cost of water or the next increment of water. Therefore, it is imperative for water agencies to replace such rate structures with those that encourage efficient use. Such rate structures should ensure that the water customer pays for the full cost of providing water services, including the cost of new supplies. The most potentially effective as well as equitable rate structures are those based on a water allocation. With respect to landscaping, allocation-based rate structures should take into account the landscape area and the evapotranspiration rate for the billing period.
- Increased revenues from tiered pricing should be used to encourage conservation and/or develop additional water supplies.
- Water meters, preferably dedicated meters, are necessary to monitor consumption. Connections without meters should be retrofitted.
- There is a major need for more information and educational programs on efficient landscape irrigation practices. For its part, CLCA is committed to investing in training opportunities for landscape professionals in the area of water efficiency and appropriate landscaping.

- California's water supplies must be augmented by new storage and conveyance facilities, water marketing, and water transfer agreements.
- Incentives are necessary to reduce landscape water use. These include water rebates for retrofitting irrigation systems, "water banking" credit to defer water use to critical periods, and penalties for water abusers through the utilization of water conservation rate structures.
- Emphasis is needed on the use of reclaimed water as an alternative long-term source for landscape irrigation. Long-term consequences to plant materials and soil should always be taken into account.
- Water requirements of plants vary. Water conservation ordinances should give specific attention to the proper grouping of plants with similar water requirements. This is essential to improving irrigation efficiency through the establishment of hydrozones. Flexibility is essential, since many plants vary in availability as well as adaptability to different climates. Plant lists can help identify similar plants and should serve as guidelines -- never as requirements.
- Further research is needed on the irrigation requirements of ornamental plants so that guidelines can be established for landscape water needs. One comprehensive but imperfect source for this information is the WUCOLS Report, *Estimating Irrigation Water Needs of Landscape Plantings in California*. The report can be accessed by clicking on the following link:
<http://www.owue.water.ca.gov/docs/wucols00.pdf#search='WUCOLS'> .
- Turfgrass is an important component in the landscape environment. It should be irrigated separately and designed for maximum irrigation efficiency.
- The California Landscape Contractors Association recommends Xeriscaping, a complex concept that uses seven principles in a creative way to conserve water in landscapes. However, we believe that recent popularization of the concept has focused excessively on two of the seven principles (both of which have been overly simplified): the use of drought-tolerant plants and a reduction of turf area. There is much more to Xeriscaping than plant selection.
- Licensed landscape contractors with significant expertise in the area of water management and should be hired to install water-efficient landscapes. These professionals or landscape architects should be utilized to design water

efficient landscapes and establish a total water management plan. Unlicensed operators should never be hired to perform these tasks.

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