

# Water district offering rebates to get rid of lawns

Tri-City homeowners can receive up to \$500 to switch to yards that are drought tolerant

**By Matthew Artz**

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FREMONT — Maintaining a nice lawn takes a lot of effort and H2O, but doing way with one is surprisingly easy. All it takes is cardboard to cover the grass, some dirt, a few native plants, a sprinkling of mulch. In about a month's time — voilà — no more lawn.

Who would do such a thing?

Hopefully everybody, local water officials say.

The Alameda County Water District, which serves Fremont, Newark and Union City, is offering rebates of up to \$500 for single-family homeowners and \$3,000 for apartment complex and commercial property owners to replace their lawns with drought-tolerant gardens.

The rebates, which are on a first come, first-served basis through June 30, would nearly cover the costs for a homeowner to replace the lawn himself and would cover about a quarter of the cost for hiring a professional to do it.

Lawn watering accounts for about half the water usage in most homes, officials said. Switching to drought-resistant plants or vegetable gardens reduces water usage by about 50 percent.

In many parts of Oakland and Berkeley, front lawns already have taken a back seat to Mediterranean-style drought-tolerant plants. But in the lawn-loving Tri-City area, many residents still have radiant yards that could rival any New England farm house, just without the 16 inches of Summer time rainfall they get back east.

Lawn removal advocates can't say for sure why the Tri-City area has been a tough nut to crack. They say that some old-timers and homeowner associations are set in their ways, and that a lot of recent immigrants can't fathom their American dream home without an American Gothic lawn.

But they think they can win some converts once people understand just how cheap and easy it is to get rid of their lawns, and how attractive the drought-tolerant plants can be. Their preferred technique is to roll cardboard —available at garden centers —over the grass and cover it with dirt mulch, and plants.

Staved of sunlight, the grass dies in darkness within a month. Within two months, the cardboard decomposes, said Ann Morrison, a Fremont-based landscape designer.

Last year, her company replaced Jane Mueller's lawn in Fremont with drought-tolerant plants. Mueller, who's lived at the home since 1975, said she wanted to use less water and spend less time keeping up her property.

She likes the results, and perhaps more importantly, so do the neighbors.

“A lot of people have asked me for Morrison’s card,” she said. “I think it has an appeal.”

The water district has set aside \$15,000 for lawn removal rebates. For more information on the rebates, call 510-668-4207 or e-mail [stephanie.nevins@acwd.com](mailto:stephanie.nevins@acwd.com)

Also the Bay-Friendly Landscaping and Gardening program is hosting demonstration from 10 to 11:30 a.m. Saturday at Regan Nursery, 4268 Decoto Road. Attendees will get plant discounts, garden gifts and be eligible for a free professional garden design.