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NEWS

Want to replace your lawn with drought-tolerant plants? You can now get paid to do it



by **Jason Ruiz**
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Dani Luna Lima of the Long Beach Water Department, stands in a demonstration garden with drought-tolerant plants at the department in Long Beach Friday, May 27, 2022. Video screen shot by Thomas R. Cordova.



Lawn to garden-Long Beach Water Department

Long Beach Post



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With outdoor watering restrictions going into effect this month and potentially even stricter orders on the horizon from state water regulators, it will likely become harder to maintain a lush, green lawn. However, the Long Beach Water Department wants to help you convert your turf into a more beautiful, drought-tolerant version of itself.

Starting June 1, residents will only be allowed to water their outdoor landscaping on Tuesdays and Saturdays and with drought conditions worsening, Gov. Gavin Newsom has hinted at even harsher measures to conserve potable water for drinking.

Converting turf lawns to more native landscaping can dramatically reduce the amount of water needed to keep them looking good, but it can also cost homeowners a substantial amount of money to carry it out.

The department, however, will now pay you for the conversion, and in some instances can help you cover the cost of having a professional design drawn up. Homeowners could qualify for up to \$15,000 in rebates to convert their lawns.

Here are a few rules and requirements to be eligible for the program:

How does the program work?

All properties serviced by the Long Beach Water Department are eligible and **after applying** you'll need to prove that you have living grass to be removed. Then you'll have to submit a plan that shows the types of plants you intend to put in the ground—they must be California native or proven to require low amounts of water—and the type of irrigation that will be used. Regular sprinkler systems are required to be capped or converted to drip irrigation and plants must cover 65% of the proposed project site. If you're planning on applying for the lawn-to-garden program it's critical to not kill or remove your turf before you're through the approval process.

How much money can I qualify for?

There are two different rates depending on if you're converting landscape in your front yard (\$3 per square foot) or if you're looking to improve a side yard or backyard (\$2 per square foot) that the program offers for turf conversion. The maximum square footage for any project is 5,000 square feet, meaning a person could qualify for up to \$15,000.

Residents can qualify for an additional \$1,500 to help with design costs if their design is drawn by **one of the department's pre-approved landscape professionals**. Additional **funding is also available from the Metropolitan Water District** to help convert traditional sprinklers into more efficient drip irrigation systems.

What types of things are not allowed?

In addition to the program requiring native, California-friendly or other less thirsty types of plants to be used in the project, there are a few things that are not allowed to be incorporated in the project, namely artificial turf.

Lauren Gold, the water department spokesperson, said the Lawn-to-Garden program has three main goals that include reducing water demand through conservation, improving air quality and increasing biodiversity.

“Artificial turf does achieve the goal of saving water, but it doesn't help with air quality or overall biodiversity in the community,” Gold said. Even small patches are prohibited from being included in plans as are large swaths of compacted dirt. No artificial materials are allowed to be used in your project.

What are some things that are required?

The program requires that plants cover about 65% of the project area, and 10% must include **California native plants**. The coverage area is evaluated on the anticipated growth of the plants once they're mature, not

when they're planted.

This is done to ensure that projects don't have large swaths of compacted dirt or other plant-less features because one of the main goals is to increase biodiversity. Projects must also include one of five stormwater retention features like a berm, a dry riverbed or a vegetated swale.

Permeable surfaces like mulch, pavers or brick set on top of sand are also approved materials. Once your project is installed you must keep it for at least five years. Removal of the project or reintroducing turf to the area could result in the department seeking a refund of up to 100% of the Lawn-to-Garden grant if the removal happens in the first year and 20% of the funds if it happens in the fifth year.

How much water does the program save?

The department estimates that for every 1,000 square feet of turf removed results in a savings of about 36,000 gallons of water. The average Long Beach resident uses about 95 gallons per day, according to the department, so a 1,000-square-foot project could save about a year's worth of water for one person.

What are some things I can do to make it easier, and cheaper?

While residents looking to participate in the program can plant any time of the year, the department suggests waiting until the fall because it's a better climate for California natives to get acclimated and established. That could allow for residents to apply now and let their lawns die naturally by not watering them over the summer after getting approved.

Gold said the department is working to create lawn signs to notify your neighbors your grass is dying as part of an ongoing conversion project. To cut down on costs, department officials recommend making the planting portion of the project a family activity that could dramatically reduce the price tag by cutting out the professional installation crews. The city also offers free mulch for pickup or delivery.



Outdoor watering limited to 2 days as water commission declares new stage of shortage

Outdoor watering will be limited to Tuesdays and Saturdays now that the Long Beach Board of Water Commissioners moved the city into Stage 2 of its water shortage conservation plan.

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