

Agaves, olive trees, phormiums, and burgundy-flowered kangaroo paws thrive on little water outside this front wall in Santa Barbara.

SMART LANDSCAPE

Hold the water

How to create a water-wise garden that's lush, colorful, and inviting

A GOOD LOW-WATER GARDEN starts with wisely chosen plants and a few basic rules. Start by leaving more areas unplanted than you would if you lived in a wetter climate—a big water savings right off the top. Make the paths generous and put gravel under seating areas instead of planting a groundcover. Use decomposed granite in place of thirsty lawn grass. Then plant the remaining spaces with unthirsty ornamentals. Finally, add a few traces of water, some real, some illusory.



LION'S TAIL



YARROW



AGAVE



MOUNTAIN FLAX



ECHEVERTIA

The plants

In the garden pictured here, most plants get watered once a week or less.

LION'S TAIL (*Leonotis leonurus*). A shrub in the mint family, with showy orange flowers.

YARROW (*Achillea millefolium*). Carefree perennial with flat-topped flower clusters. 'Paprika' is pictured.

AGAVE (*A. attenuata* 'Nova'). Smaller than the species, but still an impressive 3 feet wide. Broader, bluer leaves too.

MOUNTAIN FLAX (*Phormium cookianum* 'Cream Delight'). Needs a bit more water than *P. tenax* varieties, but showier.

ECHEVERTIA One of the prettiest succulents, especially when paired with 'Tricolor' sedum as pictured.

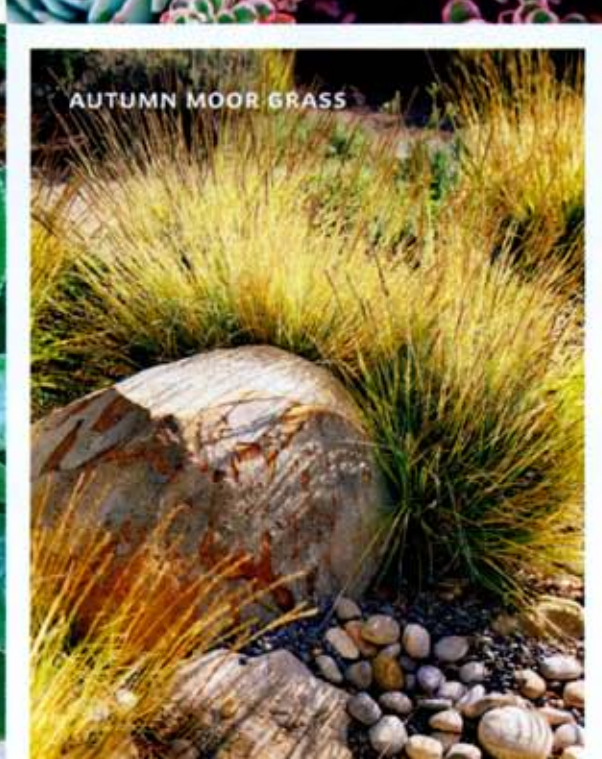
LAMB'S EARS (*Stachys byzantina*). Tough beauty forms a woolly groundcover.

AUTUMN MOOR GRASS (*Sesleria autumnalis*). Ornamental grass that grows in upright, tufted mounds.

ECHINACEA Tough perennial with daisy-like flowers in pinks, yellow, reds, and white.



LAMB'S EARS



AUTUMN MOOR GRASS



ECHINACEA



**“This meadow garden
may look lush, but waterwise,
its needs are pretty darn modest”**

—MARGARET GRACE

Elements of a water-wise landscape

PERMEABLE PAVING

Wide paths of Del Rio gravel encircle the central meadow. The permeable surface allows rainwater to percolate into the soil and reach plant roots, and suits the garden's relaxed mood.

UNTHIRSTY PLANTS

All these choices thrive in dry conditions, from the autumn moor grass in the central island to the echinaceas, the chocolate-brown smoke tree, and the 'Mermaid' climbing rose atop the wall behind it.

DRY CREEKBED

A rock-strewn channel curves through the meadow and beneath a small stone bridge to harvest rainwater. Even when it's empty, its presence suggests water.

THE GARDEN

How to capture a natural look

Owners Nancy Franco and Don Olson wanted unthirsty plants outside the front gate of their Santa Barbara property (pictured on page 18), and a meadow inside. Designer Margaret Grace gave them a meadow, but a distinctly California one—with tawny grasses and drought-tolerant wildflowers such as blue-eyed grass and yarrow. A creekbed running through it is dry most of the year, as the creeks in the West often are, but it collects and channels rainfall effectively when the time comes.

During winter and spring, the garden gets by on rainfall alone. In summer and fall, it is drip-irrigated once a week.

DESIGN Margaret Grace, Grace Design Associates, Santa Barbara (gracedesignassociates.com or 805/687-3569)



FOCAL POINT

Although mountain flax can tolerate dry conditions almost as well as the rest of the plants in the garden, this one, in a container, looks best with a bit more water.

WATER JARS

Like a dry creekbed, an empty urn suggests water without actually using any. The simplicity of its shape also makes it an ideal accent for this casual garden.

BOULDERS

Big chunks of local sandstone add drama to the garden without needing an ounce of water, and they contribute to the wild-meadow look the homeowners were after.