

# OCTOBER PROGRAM RECAP • SHARING SECRETS

The SCHS welcomed a panel of local experts in October, who shared their opinions on why and how to use eco-friendly lawn alternatives that thrive in our Mediterranean climate. The panel was composed of Ellen Mackey, senior ecologist with the Metropolitan Water District; Cassy Aoyagi, president of FormLA Landscaping; Joel Lichtenwalter, owner of Grow Outdoor Design; and moderator Wynne Wilson, owner of the landscape firm, Terra Design.

After brief introductions, Ellen Mackey was the first speaker, and she focused her presentation on the ecological issues facing Los Angeles with respect to conventional lawns. In addition to requiring more irrigation, turf lawns also pollute the groundwater and stormwater with chemical runoff from pesticides and fertilizers, as well as contributing to CO<sup>2</sup> emissions and noise pollution from lawn mowers, edgers and blowers. Mackey's solution is to remove the lawn and plant a

Photo by Ellen Mackey



garden instead, which is an ever-evolving ecosystem, as opposed to the monoculture of a lawn which reduces biodiversity. Her own home native plant garden in the urban/wildland interface uses companion planting, composting, and other methods to create a beautiful, productive backyard garden and orchard. It is certified by the National Wildlife Federation's Wildlife Habitat Program, and for five years has been included on the Theodore Payne Foundation's annual garden tour.

The next presenter was Cassy Aoyagi, whose full-service landscaping firm, Form L.A. is dedicated to saving L.A. with its own authentic beauty. She spoke about her experiences with lawn alternatives and offered suggestions for what you might plant once your turf is gone. Red fescue, common yarrow,

dune sedge and "high-heat tolerant" seed blends were some of her choices,

Photos by Cassy Aoyagi



while *Dymondia* was specifically ruled out as being too weed-prone and never quite living up to its promise. Many of these selections use up to 80% less water than grass, benefit the soil and watertable, and are also aesthetically pleasing by providing varied color and texture in the landscape, compared to a monochromatic lawn. Aoyagi concluded with her message about gardening, saying that "Our choices now will shape the future environment, human health and well being."

Aoyagi was followed by L.A.-based landscape designer Joel Lichtenwalter, whose firm, Grow Outdoor Design, is guided by the desire to create inspired, informed, and sustainable outdoor spaces. Joel is a former board member of SCHS as well as the Association of Professional Landscape Designers (APLD). He showed before and after pictures of his projects, which included some lawn substitutes, such as kurapia, and transition zone grasses such as *Carex divulsa* and *Carex sp.* 'Pomona', but emphasized that his preference is to replace lawns with garden spaces, rather than just ground covers that resemble turf. He shared a story about a local city block where he replaced

Photos by Joel Lichtenwalter



the lawn at one home, and then a number of the neighbors eventually followed suit, resulting in a diversity of landscaping that now serves as

an example of landscaping options for other homeowners contemplating lawn removal. Joel believes it is up to us gardeners to change L.A. in urban areas for the benefit of future generations.

After the panel concluded their presentations, moderator Wynne Wilson, whose landscape firm Terra Design promotes restoration, preservation, and education, asked the panelists to provide some useful tips. These included: beginning lawn removal gradually by reducing the area with the addition of planting beds, which can be expanded over time; creating a specific (but smaller) area of low-water grasses designated for children and pets; letting your needs dictate what adaptations you make; and not forgetting the parkway strip when re-designing a front yard. Afterward Wilson opened up the Q&A to the audience, and asked the panelists to provide some final comments before concluding the program.

✂ Sabine Steinmetz

*NOTE: Opinions and recommendations made by guest speakers are their own. The SCHS strives to share horticultural knowledge and diverse viewpoints, but does not expressly endorse or support every statement made by any individual presenter.*

## SHARING SECRETS

Sadly, we have had no participation in our "Sharing Secrets" column for the last two months. We know it's a busy time of year for gardeners, but have submitted another question for November. If there is no response again, we may ask members whether this feature is no longer relevant, and possibly opt to discontinue it at the beginning of the new year.

You can answer the November question online at [www.socalhort.org](http://www.socalhort.org) or respond by email to [gardensbysabine@aol.com](mailto:gardensbysabine@aol.com):

**Are you foraging in your garden to make seasonal treats and/or crafts?**

Comments about the "Sharing Secrets" column (relevancy, topics, other) would also be welcomed, so we can gauge members' interest and make adjustments accordingly.

*Thank you!*