



Examples of lawn alternatives from John Greenlee's [website](#).

Rethinking Yards of Green Grass

Two of our members attended the Sept. 17 Lawn Alternative Workshop sponsored by the East Bay Municipal Utility District. This report was written by Lisa Robinson with contributions from Jan Egan.

Northern California has experienced two of the driest winters on record, forcing designers and homeowners to examine how to create more water-efficient yards. According to Dick Bennett, water conservation administrator at EBMUD, grass makes up 50% of irrigated landscaped area, yet consumes 80% of summer irrigation water.

Changing the way Californians think about the traditional lawn was addressed at the workshop by Suzanne Arca, landscape designer and educator, and owner of [Suzanna Arca Landscaping](#), Albany, and John Greenlee, lawn alternative advocate and owner of [Greenlee Nursery](#), Chino. Arca outlined ways to change California's design aesthetic. Existing lawns can be minimized with hardscape or eliminated in favor of interesting shrubs and other "green space panels."

Alternatives to traditional turf lawn offered by Arca include low-growing juniper, vinca minor, rubus pentalobus, ceanothus, dymondia margaretae, and colorful succulents. For functional plants in areas getting foot traffic, she recommended chamomile and thyme, both of which require much less water and maintenance than a traditional lawn.

Greenlee advocated residential and commercial meadows to add color, movement, style, and sustainability to the suburban landscape. He favors climate-appropriate landscapes to "break away from the turf grass culture that is draining our resources."

Beautiful and diverse grasses of every color and size can be found on his [website](#).

Rethinking our yards won't happen overnight, the workshop acknowledged, but we can take baby steps toward planting for the climate in which we live. As John Greenlee said, "We can't just be decorating anymore.... This is about our planet."