

California's New Front Yard Workshops End on a High Note

By: Diana Jeffery, Ph.D., CNGA New Front Yard Workshop Specialist

In front of a sold-out audience at the University of California Merced in March, CNGA recently presented the final workshop in a five-part series entitled *California's New Front Yard: Creating a Low-Water Landscape*. This successful event wrapped up a year and a half of workshops funded by the California Department of Water Resources as a direct response to the ongoing drought that has led to regulations severely limiting water available for landscape irrigation.

The pilot *New Front Yard* workshop was held at UC Davis in September 2014. The event sold out at 120 participants with over 35 people on the waiting list. The success of this workshop was largely due to the exceptional instructors, staff, and partners that all contributed to the event and to the skilled program development talent of CNGA's Rebecca Green. Building upon the success of the first workshop, DWR agreed to four additional workshops that were held in Fairfield (October 2015), Sacramento (October 2015), Santa Cruz (February 2016) and Merced (March 2016). All were well-attended with 85 to 100+ participants at each workshop.

In each geographic area, CNGA formed new partnerships with local water agencies, cities, counties, and universities to put on a high-quality workshop specifically tailored to each region. Our partners provided venues, helped with marketing and sponsorships, and participated in many other tasks. The Santa Cruz and Merced workshops were in communities relatively new to CNGA, and where our organization was largely unknown. Setting up such programs in new areas created unique challenges, but the rewards were many. We made new contacts, forged new relationships, and enlisted local speakers that gave regionally-specific presentations on native landscape design and maintenance.



Dakotah Bertsch, Landscape Designer and Project Manager at Ecological Concerns, gives a morning presentation on lawn removal at the UC Santa Cruz Arboretum.

Each one-day workshop consisted of morning classroom sessions, a Q & A panel with the instructors, and afternoon break-out sessions that usually included field tours. Former CNGA board member Andrew Fulks charmed audiences as Master of Ceremonies and panel moderator. Classroom sessions provided participants with detailed, science-based guidelines for converting high-water-use conventional lawns

into attractive, native, low-water-use landscapes appropriate for local climates. Four expert instructors presented step-by-step approaches to reimagining and redesigning lawns, including a comprehensive range of options and the advantages and disadvantages for each approach. Each instructor presented on one of four topics: inventory and design, native plant selection and location, lawn removal methods, and long-term care and maintenance including water-efficient irrigation.

After lunch, participants were divided into smaller groups for break-out sessions and walking field tours. At the Sacramento workshop, William Granger, Water Conservation Coordinator for City of Sacramento, took participants on a tour of nearby front yards that were recently redesigned. In Santa Cruz, UCSC Arboretum Director Martin Quigley and California Native Plant Program Director Brett Hall gave a tour of the Arboretum's plant gardens. Most recently, Monique Kolster, Interim Director and Naturalist Lecturer of the UC Merced Vernal Pools and Grassland Reserve, led a walking tour where participants learned about native plants in their natural setting.



Brett Hall, California Native Plant Program Director at the UC Santa Cruz Arboretum, leads a tour of the native plant garden.

The CNGA New Front Yard Team included board members (J.P. Marié, Emily Allen, Billy Krimmel, Jim Hanson, Robert Evans, Jodie Sheffield), former board members (Andrew Fulks and Ingrid Morken), and administrative staff (Liz Cieslak, Diana Jeffery, and Rebecca Green). The hard work of these individuals, as well as that of the instructors, volunteers, and other helpers was widely recognized by workshop participants. Claudia Boulton, owner of Wild Rose Landscape & Garden Design, noted that "As a landscape designer, member of APLD and a Master Gardener, I attend several educational conferences each year. This was one of the most organized, informational and best run seminars I've ever attended."

Now that the workshops have concluded, CNGA will compile and synthesize all of the content into an interactive educational module that will be available online in June 2016. We will also explore opportunities for similar workshops in the future, so keep an eye on our website (www.cnga.org) and our Facebook page for updates. Meanwhile, perhaps you have a lawn or greenspace that would make a good candidate for conversion to a native, low-water landscape?