

LESS LAWN MORE EFFICIENCY

Transforming a Thirsty Lawn into a Modern, Sustainable Refuge



California Flannel Bush *Fremontodendron* spp., California native

Project Snapshot

Jamacha Park HOA

LOCATION: Rancho San Diego (El Cajon), San Diego County

LEAD ENTITY: Jamacha Park Homeowners Association

SUPPORT: County of San Diego Landscape Optimization Service (LOS), Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, San Diego County Water Authority, and Otay Water District, with technical assistance from Environmental Incentives, Monarch Environmental, and MSE Landscaping



Project Overview

Jamacha Park, a 64-home community in Rancho San Diego, had an outdated, high-maintenance common area landscape with about 8 acres of lawn. With support from the County of San Diego's Landscape Optimization Service (LOS) program, the HOA converted 25,000 square feet of lawn into a modern, low-water-use landscape featuring water-wise and pollinator-friendly plants.

Using the knowledge, tools, and relationships built through LOS, Jamacha Park then completed a second phase, bringing the total lawn transformation to 58,000 square feet. Phase 3 is now underway and will expand the conversion to 100,000 square feet, an effort projected to save up to 4 million gallons of water annually.

In 2024, the project received a One Water Award from the Metropolitan Water District for its integration of water-wise plants, efficient irrigation, and stormwater capture. The project serves as an award-winning model for HOAs seeking long-term water savings and resilient landscape design.

"The final landscape exceeded my expectations. These areas were neglected, and this has breathed new life into them. I hope the project will show other communities what is possible. There is a way to get water savings and still have a beautiful landscape everyone can enjoy."

Mary Kay Sieckman,

Jamacha Park HOA Board Member

BEFORE



AFTER: 14 months after installation



Garden Features

Includes new permeable walkways surrounded by colorful water-wise shrubs, perennials, and groundcovers such as Lantana, Kangaroo Paws, Rock Purslane, Flax, Salvias, Agaves, Monkeyflower, and Seaside daisies. Existing trees were preserved and protected by installing new drip irrigation. Rock-lined swales manage stormwater runoff from uphill properties. Decomposed granite walkways and stairs from backyard gates enable residents to easily access and enjoy the common area. Large boulders serve as accents.

Project Highlights

PROJECT FEATURE	DETAIL
Lawn Removed	58,000 sq. ft. of nonfunctional lawn replaced
Plant Palette	Colorful, water-wise shrubs, perennials, and groundcovers, adding seasonal color and texture while attracting pollinators
Landscape Features	Rock-lined swales for stormwater capture, decomposed granite walkways, and backyard-access stairs
Irrigation System	80% reduction; estimated 2.6 million gallons annually – enough for 22 households
Water Savings	Completed in two phases; Phase 1 completed in 11 months
Project Timeline	Professionally designed and installed, with stormwater feature integration and project management by the Landscape Optimization Service team. Using experience from Phase 1, HOA took the lead in Phase 2
Installation Approach	Estimated \$4–\$5 per square foot
Project Cost	\$232,000 in utility incentives and stacked rebates from the County of San Diego's Watershed Protection Program, Metropolitan Water District, San Diego County Water Authority, and Otay Water District
Funding Sources	Easy access to nature in a beautiful, sustainable suburban setting
Community Benefits	From Phase 1 (25,000 square feet), the HOA expects to save \$27,000 on water utility bills over 10 years
Return on Investment	Much lower maintenance as well as lower water use

Get Started in Your Community

1. Create long-term goals for sustainability efforts.
2. Identify lawn areas with no recreational use; consider maintenance costs as well as water use.
3. Explore funding from your water agency, plus county, regional, or state programs.
4. Tackle a large project in stages with available resources.
5. Engage the community through education and events.

Tips for Other HOAs

Consider a Phased Approach: Not enough capital to remove all your unused lawn? Consider tackling the project in stages to maximize rebate opportunities and as resources are available.

Start with Areas of Consensus: Find areas that won't be controversial if removed, such as those with no recreational use.

Seek Assistance: Reach out to your local water agency to learn about programs for which your association may qualify. Stacking multiple incentives, including rebates, can help keep costs lower. Technical assistance may be available, too.

Design for People: Incorporate pathways, seating, and plantings that invite exploration—not just efficiency.



NonFunctionalTurfCA.org