

# LESS LAWN MORE EFFICIENCY

**From Mowing to Growing: Turning Unused Lawn Into a Garden that Teaches**



*Toyon Heteromeles arbutifolia, California native*

## Project Snapshot

### UC Master Gardener Demonstration Garden

LOCATION: Loomis Library & Community Learning Center, Placer County

LEAD ENTITY: UC Master Gardeners of Placer County

SUPPORT: Placer County Water Agency, Town of Loomis, and the Loomis Library & Community Learning Center



## Project Overview

To reduce water waste and showcase sustainable design, the UC Master Gardeners of Placer County—supported by the Placer County Water Agency, Town of Loomis, and the Loomis Library and Learning Center—converted one-third acre (including 11,000 square feet of nonfunctional lawn) behind the Loomis Library into a regionally inspired demonstration garden that thrives on low water use.

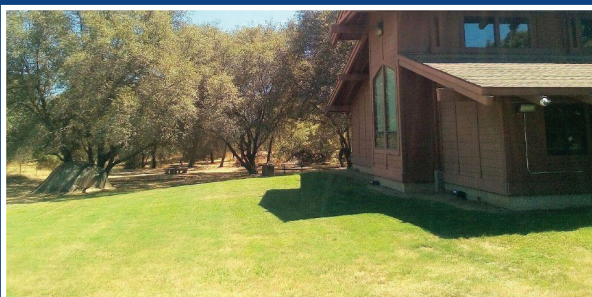
The result is a “living classroom,” a thriving public space that’s beautiful and educational. Showcasing Master Gardener expertise, the garden invites residents, school groups, and library visitors to explore water-wise design, native planting, and climate-ready landscaping that can be easily replicated.

*“It’s become a center for education and community engagement. Kids love our garden program. They’re learning about native plants in a landscape they can see, smell, touch, and feel.”*

**Tece Markel**

UC Master Gardeners of Placer County

## BEFORE



## Garden Features

After the transformation, distinct spaces showcase native grasses and shrubs (such as Manzanita, Ceanothus, and Salvia); pollinator-friendly perennials; edible plants (vegetables, fruit, and herbs); and mow-free grass. More than a dozen themed beds demonstrate techniques for shaded areas, pollinator habitat, and sensory engagement.

## AFTER: Immediately after installation



## Project Highlights

PROJECT FEATURE	DETAIL
Lawn Removed	11,000 sq. ft. of nonfunctional lawn replaced
Plant Palette	90+ native and drought-tolerant species plus water-wise edible plants
Landscape Features	13 themed garden beds (such as shade, sensory, pollinator), walking paths, and educational signage
Irrigation System	Replaced conventional spray irrigation system with high-efficiency drip irrigation system
Water Savings	An estimated 24% reduction in irrigation use
Project Timeline	Six months from start to completion, after two years of planning and developing an agreement between the UC Regents of the University of California and Town of Loomis
Installation Approach	Professionally designed and installed with support from volunteers
Project Cost	\$196,000 total (~\$13.50 per square foot), including value of in-kind donations and volunteer hours
Funding Sources	A \$20,000 rebate from PCWA plus donations, a capital fundraiser, in-kind donations, and volunteer labor
Community Benefits	Regular tours, public events, and educational outreach
Return on Investment	Much lower maintenance as well as lower water use

### Get Started at Your Local Public Site

1. Integrate lawn conversion into capital planning or sustainability efforts.
2. Identify publicly visible lawn areas with no recreational use to showcase.
3. Explore funding from your water agency or state programs.
4. Partner with local gardening groups, nonprofits, and schools.
5. Engage the community through education and events.

### Tips for Other Public Properties

**It Takes a Village:** A lot of hands-on effort goes into community-minded landscape makeovers. Identify champions: Passionate, dedicated volunteers and other agency partners who will contribute time, energy, and money plus long-term stewardship. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

**Train for Success:** Decide early who will manage the irrigation controller and system access. Provide hands-on training so volunteers and staff understand how to operate and maintain the system.

**Consider Creative Fundraising and Promotion:** Be resourceful. The Friends of Loomis Library organized a commemorative "Buy a Brick" fundraiser during construction. These bricks now surround a fountain in the garden. PCWA supported this effort with marketing through social media during fundraising.

**Look Beyond Walls:** Tight on indoor space? Unused lawn can be converted to expand activities outdoors. The UC Master Gardeners use the demonstration garden as an outdoor classroom and meeting area.



**NonFunctionalTurfCA.org**