



Russian River Watershed Association

300 Seminary Ave, Ukiah, CA 95482 • (707)833-2553 • www.rrwatershed.org

RRWA Environmental Column – December 2015 Finding the Right Landscape Professional

Keeping a well-groomed, beautiful yard can be a burden during a drought, but it doesn't have to be. The right landscape professional can help turn your withering yard into a sanctuary that is water-conscious, low maintenance, and provides noticeable cost-savings when the water bill arrives. In California, the water used to irrigate landscaping accounts for more than 50% of total residential water consumption. Landscape professionals influence water use by advising which plants should be used and by managing irrigation systems.

Homeowners and businesses frequently hire landscape professionals to assist with planning their yards and gardens. A landscape professional might be hired to design and install a new landscape, to renovate an existing landscape, or to provide maintenance services. Regardless of their role, it is important to ensure that the professional has the skills needed to effectively perform their duties for the region in which they are working.

In California, any landscape construction that totals more than \$500 for labor and materials must be conducted by a licensed contractor. You can find licensed landscape contractors through the Contractor State License Board under classification C-27. The California Landscape Contractors Association (CLCA) is a trade organization of licensed landscape and landscape-related contractors, and is a great place to start when looking for a licensed contractor.

Landscape professionals can also differentiate themselves by obtaining specialty certifications to indicate that they are proficient in specific fields such as water management or sustainable landscaping. The Qualified Water Efficient Landscaper (QWEL) professional certification program is offered by the Sonoma-Marín Saving Water Partnership to landscape professionals in Sonoma and Marin counties. QWEL is an EPA WaterSense professional certification program in irrigation auditing. Mendocino County does not have an equivalent certification program, but it is still worth seeking out landscapers who are familiar with water saving techniques.

Professional certification programs provide landscape professionals with education and instruction on plant science, local water supply systems, principles of proper plant selection for the local climate, irrigation system design and maintenance, and irrigation system programming and operation.

Certified professionals are well positioned to provide landscape services to homeowners and businesses that want to cut outdoor water use. Such services can include auditing an existing irrigation system, removing turf, converting to a drip irrigation, and optimizing irrigation system performance with proper programming throughout the year.

With California in its fourth year of drought, it is increasingly important that residents act collectively to decrease outdoor water usage. Whether you hire a landscape professional or are a home gardener, the resources listed below are intended to support environmentally-friendly landscaping and to aid in the protection and conservation of the Russian River Watershed:



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- [Russian River-Friendly Landscape Guidelines](http://www.rrwatershed.org/programs/RRFLG): <http://www.rrwatershed.org/programs/RRFLG>
- [Sonoma County Master Gardeners](http://ucanr.edu/sites/scmg/): <http://ucanr.edu/sites/scmg/>
- [Mendocino County Master Gardeners](http://cemendocino.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardener578/): http://cemendocino.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardener578/
- [Water Wise Gardening](http://www.sonoma.watersavingplants.com/): <http://www.sonoma.watersavingplants.com/>
- [Qualified Water Efficient Landscapers](http://www.qwel.net/): <http://www.qwel.net/>

This article was authored by Gregory Plumb of the Sonoma County Water Agency, on behalf of RRWA. RRWA (www.rrwatershed.org) is an association of local public agencies in the Russian River Watershed that have come together to coordinate regional programs for clean water, fisheries restoration, and watershed enhancement.