

RUSSIAN RIVER-FRIENDLY LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES



JANUARY 29, 2013 EVENT WORLD CAFÉ TABLE QUESTIONS

RRWA hosted a morning event to promote the principals and practices of Russian River-Friendly Landscaping based on the Guidelines launched in 2010. The event featured presentations by landscape professionals and community leaders, table resources, and a demonstration garden tour. Attendees of the event also had the opportunity to participate in a “World Café”-style interactive brainstorming session on how to improve and promote the program within the watershed. Three questions were presented to the participants. Following a table discussion, participants wrote their ideas and answers on the tables. The following is a summary of responses.

What tools, trainings, and resources would be most helpful to you in increasing use of the RRFLG Principles and Practices?

- RRFLG
 - Workshops on how to more effectively implement each principle
 - Residential/neighborhood workshops and potlucks led by RRWA staff
 - Include principles in neighborhood watch group/HOA meetings and give out information (utilize an established network)
 - RRFLG membership group with regular meetings
 - RRFLG outreach and education task force
- Hands-on training
 - Practical application of the principles
 - Irrigation methods geared towards contractors/installers
- Other training recommendations
 - Bay-friendly training
 - Sustainability training
 - Safety training
 - Training for all levels
 - Include “beginner/homeowner” specific training
 - Grey water/non-potable water use trainings
 - Purple pipe training
 - Bilingual training
 - Classes from Rick Taylor
 - Include videos of lectures/talks
 - Weekend classes for those who work during the week
 - Project-long training (from start to finish, to ongoing observations)
 - Plant identification classes
 - Train elected officials
 - Urban farming/planting edibles training

- K-12 Education
 - Create games that reward planning (for the kids)
 - Field trips
 - Integrate into “big picture” curriculum (i.e. global warming, etc.)
- Local retailers (including big box) collaborating with RRWA (and other resources) to stock appropriate plant choices and host outreach materials
- Demonstration gardens/landscapes
 - Native plant gardens available to the public
 - Map of demonstration gardens
 - Field trips
 - Demo gardens should be easily accessible and (parks, shopping centers, etc.) and include plant and feature placards
- Outreach
 - How-to videos on proper irrigation, contour swales, etc on RRFLG website and City websites. Videos would target both residential and commercial landscapes.
 - Television outreach to reach the general public
 - Increase outreach to architects to minimize landscaping plans that utilize fast-growing plants, invasive plants, etc.
 - Create an architect-specific principles handbook
 - Social media outreach – Twitter, Facebook, etc.
 - Create region-specific social network
 - A RRFLG app
 - Promote case studies
 - Lunch learning events
- Regulatory
 - Proper labeling of plants at stores (genus, etc)
 - Local/Regional ordinance requiring RR-Friendly principles
 - Financial incentives for RRFLG implementation in the form of reduced permit fees
 - Mandatory training in RRFLG design and installation
 - Fines for those who violate the principles
- Online resource library
 - PDFs, videos, photos, etc
 - Include lists of professionals/organizations who are knowledgeable on the principles and are willing to share their ideas and expertise
 - Long Beach Water Department website (as example for potential Santa Rosa/RRWA web resources page)
 - Existing online resources:
 - Qualified Water Efficient Landscaper training: www.QWELtraining.net
 - City of Santa Rosa Return on Investment (ROI) calculator
 - City of Santa Rosa Water-Use Efficiency webpage: Srcity.org/wue
- Financial Resources/Incentives
 - Grants for both residents and professional landscapers
 - Grants for leaders and teachers who would host classes, etc (public, K-12, college)
 - Rebates
 - Financial incentives for on-site composting in form of reduced garbage/recycling bills
 - “Cash for Grass” program where lawn-owners have financial incentives for converting turf to low water-use landscapes
- Branding
 - Signage/recognition for implementation
 - Labeling of RRFLG plants in nurseries and stores

What are the barriers to implementing the RRFLG Principles and Practices and how can we address those barriers?

This question had consistent answers for both of its parts. The answers below are divided into two sections: First, the barriers are listed; and second, the solutions of how we can potentially overcome each barrier. Because the question's second half is closely related to "what tools, training or resources would be helpful" (see page 1), there were a lot of overlapping themes.

Barriers:

- Cost
 - Training
 - Conversion/Installation
 - Maintenance
- Existing landscapes
- Lack of information and education
- Apathy
- Fear
- Landscapes designed for aesthetics alone
- Cultural conception of lawns and yards
 - Familiarity of care
 - Social conformance
 - HOA rules
- Misconceptions of "low-water use gardens"
- Inaccessibility to plants and materials

How can we address those barriers?

Cost

- Training is costly and time-consuming
 - Public forums and workshops by non-profits, government agencies, and community groups can provide training
- Conversion – Initial costs of conversion and installation is too high
 - ROI calculator can show long term savings
 - Rebate programs for lawn conversions, e.g. "cash for grass"
 - Promote messages of improved property image and long-term value of the landscape
- Maintenance
 - Training for clients can show that they can cut maintenance costs by doing work themselves
 - Maintenance costs are balanced by water savings

Existing landscapes

- Converting existing landscapes poses design challenges

- Design challenges are an opportunity for innovation
- They can become “demo” projects

Lack of information/education

- General public and clients are unaware of the issues and how to fix them
 - Outreach through various media would increase awareness and guide people to sources
 - Education on the subject should be integrated into K-12 curriculum
 - Outreach materials could be prepared by non-profits and agencies and provided to landscapers to easier educate clients
 - Online directory or library of educational materials should be made available
 - Mailing list to send the latest information/innovations
- Landscape professionals unaware of how to integrate solutions into business model or why it would be beneficial
 - Events (i.e. workshops) on technical aspects of RRFLG principles (installation, maintenance, low-water use plants, rain water capture systems, etc)
 - Break down of economic incentives for business incorporation of principles

Apathy

- People are not motivated to make changes
 - Empower people to make a difference by what they do in their landscape – each act, each change for the better adds up
 - Highlight incentives: water saving, food growing, sustainability

Fear

- People fear new designs and techniques
 - Demonstration gardens and champions of change can show that it works
 - Show clients that a non-“conventional” landscape can still be beautiful
 - Education on maintenance

Landscapes designed for aesthetics alone

- Landscape architects often design for aesthetics, not practicality
 - Targeted outreach at landscape architects
- Designers and installers need outreach materials for their customers as well that relate the message that initial costs are higher but are outweighed by long term savings

Cultural conception of lawns and yards

- Familiarity of care

- Education and training can empower people to research and learn new techniques
- Social conformance - Cultural conception of the “American Dream” – a big house surrounded by green lawn.
 - Old fashioned ideas about landscape design, materials, and maintenance can be reduced with education
- HOA rules often do not allow non-standard aesthetic
 - Target outreach to HOAs
 - Give HOAs incentives for implementing principals

Misconceptions of “low-water use gardens”

- Misconception of what a low-water use landscape looks like (desert, cactus, rocks, no greenery)
 - Demonstration gardens
 - Education on rain capture and grey water irrigation

Inaccessibility to plants and materials

- Local and low-water use plants and materials are not available in many conventional or big-box stores.
 - Local nurseries should be part of outreach efforts
 - Labor and materials can be shared among groups and neighborhoods

Other barriers

- Other barriers mentioned: ignorance, ADA requirements impede swales, curb cuts, etc, some technology (ex: drip irrigation) is difficult to maintain, pests are miscategorized, regulations, permeable hardscape products degrade quickly,
 - These barriers did not have solutions written on the tables.

Here is the vision - In 10-15 years, every landscape (new and existing) in the Russian River watershed incorporates some or all of the RRFLG Principles and Practices. How did we make this happen?

Program Enhancement

- Established strong network with organizations (CLCA, APLD, Daily Acts, SCWA, HOAs, Cities, business parks, etc.)
- Added an 8th principal: growing food
- Collected data and manage sites
- Recognition programs
- Competitions
- Created a web-based compilation of resources for small, residential gardens to large, professionals landscaped sites
- Created RRFLG certificate and made it (and QWEL) certification mandatory for City landscape workers and contractors

Outreach

- Invited guest speakers to community groups
- Tabled at Wednesday Night Market and other farmer's markets
- Used social media for outreach (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
- Seminars
- Used TV commercials and radio ads
- Created targeted outreach for golf industry
- Translated outreach and education materials to Spanish and other languages to reach a broader audience
- Made outreach efforts to big-box retailers
 - Sold them on the marketing benefits of drought resistant and native plants
 - Displayed RRFLG and Bay Friendly materials in big-box stores
 - Offered a discount program to those who purchase RR-friendly plants and materials
- Promoted "Slow, spread, sink" message
- Increased drought-tolerant and native plant awareness and availability
- Created marketing campaign that included vision of sustainable aesthetics in landscapes
- Shared "the big picture"
- Stressed low-maintenance and cost benefits to homeowners

Education/Certification/Training

- Offered education and training for field staff and landscape industry
 - Free RRFLG training during evenings in the off season (winter)
- Enhanced learning programs that feature hands-on activities
- Educated government agencies, HOAs, Rotary Club, Junior League of Napa/Sonoma, Young Professionals Network, 20/30 club

- Converted school sites and teach k-12 students so when they grow into adulthood it will be the new “normal”
 - Incorporated into existing SCWA water conservation education program
 - 7 year program, focus on one principle per year
- Landscapers became Green Business certified to better market themselves on responsible landscaping practices
 - Can be in addition to RRFLG certification
- Required certification for landscaping business license
- Educated gardeners in ecology
- Conducted case studies

Government/Municipal cooperation

- Government rebates and grants for implementation became available
- Regulations and ordinances to implement principles were created
- City and County buildings implemented the practices and served as examples
- Incorporated RRFLG principles into City standards for new and renovated landscapes
 - Changed building requirements to include rainwater catchment systems and gray-water use systems
- The City and County sponsored demo gardens and events

Financial Incentives

- Taxed sod
- Increased cost of non-local resources
- Saved cost through reuse of materials, repurposed materials, and shared labor.
- Water cost drove change
- Rebates were offered
- Sponsored programs for garden conversions
- Growing your own food = saving money

Community

- Collaborated with each other and shared ideas at seminars, conventions, classes, websites, etc
- Experimented and recorded progress
- Garden tours were offered
- Shared program information with neighbors who have high impact gardens
- Community gardens for condo and apartment communities became prevalent

Program Implementation

- Transition from chemical to organic fertilizer
- Dedicated water management
- Eliminated outdated practices
- Learned from successes and failures

- Smaller footprint homes and live roofs
- Standardized equipment and practices
- Encouraged people to push brooms instead of blowers
- Rainwater was harvested
- Converted/implemented “Audubon type” portions of California (parks, schools, churches, and open spaces)
- Products for existing structures (green roofs, slim line rain tanks, etc.) became available

Other

- Quantified the value of change
- Kindness and compassion for all beings seen and unseen
- The ripple effect: current efforts had great impact and influence
 - Loss of habitat aspect seen by next generation
 - The next generation brought change because they were exposed to these ideas now
- There was a change in perception of what a beautiful landscape looks like (ecologically balanced and natural)
- Change in climate will forced a change in practice
- Kept the “cash-for-grasses” program
- Landowner became responsible
- Aligned program with people’s personal goals