

Native Plants Provide An Attractive Alternative

Rancho Santa Fe Golf Club
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Issue

Water is hard to come by at Rancho Santa Fe Golf Club in Southern California. Well water is high in salts, reclaimed water infrastructure is miles away and the cost for water continues to rise. In addition, the state instituted a mandatory 25-percent overall water reduction in response to a prolonged drought. In this context, continuing to irrigate out-of-play areas at Rancho Santa Fe Golf Club no longer made economic or environmental sense.

Action

To reduce irrigation, Rancho Santa Fe Golf Club removed 18.6 acres of turfgrass from tee surrounds and other out-of-play areas. These areas were then capped with manufactured angular sand that packs tight and does not move during wind or rain events. Turfgrass was replaced with drought-tolerant native and semi-native plant species like *Romneya*, *Salvia clevelandii*, *Aristida purpurea*, *Muhlenbergia rigens* and *Ceanothus griseus horizontalis*. A low-volume irrigation system was specifically designed and installed to help establish the juvenile plants.



Selecting the proper rootzone and plant materials will help create aesthetically pleasing and sustainable landscapes in areas selected for turf removal.

Results

The turf-reduction project yielded an initial 17-percent decrease in water use, a significant step towards achieving the state-mandated 25-percent reduction. Rancho Santa Fe Golf Club also saved \$25,000 on their water bills in April and May 2015, savings that will continue to increase into the future as the young plant material matures and deeper root systems develop. In addition, reducing maintained turf in out-of-play areas allowed more resources to be focused on the primary playing areas. This helped the quality and playability of the golf course remain consistent, or possibly even improve, under tough water restrictions.

Turf reduction is a growing trend. Following this project, Rancho Santa Fe Golf Club has a balance of 98 acres of predominantly warm-season turf and 18.6 acres of water-conserving landscape that requires minimal inputs. One of the challenges they faced when developing their turf-reduction plan was selecting an effective alternative to maintained turf. These areas had to be aesthetically pleasing and playable, as well as environmentally and economically sound. Hiring a qualified golf course or landscape architect to assist with implementing a turf-reduction program can help ensure that golfers, managers, and regulators are all pleased with the results.