

# Green Section Record

## REGIONAL UPDATE

July 20, 2018



*Turf reduction areas have saved a significant amount of water, but they come with new expenses for weed control, mulch replacement and general maintenance.*

## LESSONS LEARNED FROM TURF REDUCTION PROJECTS

BY PAT GROSS | REGIONAL DIRECTOR, WEST REGION

Over the past four years, several golf courses in Southern California took advantage of rebates from local water districts to eliminate turf in out-of-play areas. Overall, these projects have achieved their original intention of reducing water consumption, but superintendents have had to learn along the way what it actually takes to manage turf reduction zones. Here are some of the lessons learned based on discussions with several superintendents in Southern California:

**Turf reduction areas have reduced overall water consumption.** Many courses report using 15 to 25 percent less water after turf reduction, depending on project size and scope.

**There is no savings in labor.** While turf reduction has decreased the staff time spent mowing, these hours have been reallocated to weed control, mulch replacement and drip irrigation repair in turf reduction areas. In some cases, labor costs have increased following turf reduction, especially where there are high

expectations for maintaining a weed-free and highly manicured appearance. Some facilities are evaluating the cost of hiring a landscape contracting company to do monthly or quarterly trimming, weed control and general maintenance in turf reduction areas.

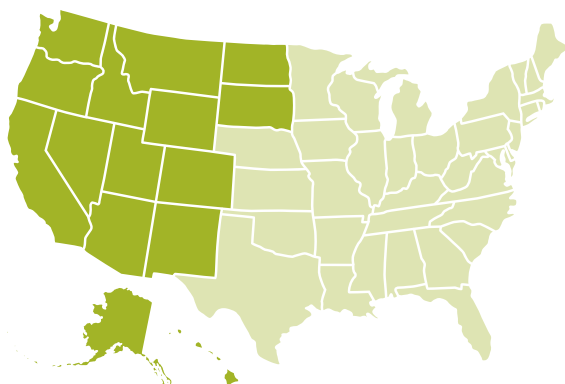
**It takes time to achieve plant density and maturity.** Many people expect rapid coverage and an instant “wow factor” from the drought-tolerant plants installed in turf reduction areas. However, horticulture experts recommend using small planting stock so that the plants can better adapt to local soil and growing conditions. These plants typically take three to five years to mature and achieve acceptable coverage and density, so it is important to exercise patience and allow turf reduction areas to fill in over time.

**Turf reduction areas are a work in progress.** Many courses are finding that they need to adjust the location and species of plants in turf reduction zones. Some plants end up growing larger than expected and may need to be thinned or relocated to perimeter areas where they won’t come into play. Other plants may not tolerate local growing conditions and need to be replaced with different species. Like any landscape area, adjustments are typically necessary to achieve and maintain the desired appearance.



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