Marina Coast
Water District

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LANDCAPE PRINCIPLES

1. Planning and Design

Draw a layout of your yard showing existing structures, trees, shrubs, grass, and other plants. Determine your landscape budget, preferred style, function of the area(s), drainage needs, maintenance, and water requirements. Next, sketch your desired landscape plan. Be sure to group plants with similar water needs together.

2. Soil Evaluation and Improvement

The best thing you can do for your plants is to improve the water storage capacity of the soil by ensuring deep, high-quality soil. 6 inches of good soil is desirable, with 12-18 inches being ideal. Native and local adapted plants do extremely well with native soils, while improved soils benefit most plant species.

Top-dress your turf with shallow layers of quality soil amendments to build a deeper, richer soil profile. This can be done periodically and goes a long way toward improving your turfgrass quality, especially stress resistance.

Composts and landscape soils are readily available. Incorporating generous amounts into planting beds will reward your landscape with a larger reservoir of moisture-holding organic matter.

3. Practical Turf Areas

Turfgrasses generally require more frequent watering than native or adapted plants, so use grass in functional areas that can be efficiently watered and maintained. For example, instead of grass, put ground cover in areas that are narrow, small, sloping, odd-shaped, or close to pavement. Many ground cover plants use much less water than turfgrass, are more attractive, and require substantially less maintenance.

4. Appropriate Plant Selection

Choose trees, shrubs, and ground covers that are either native or adapted our local climate and soils. Consult with professional horticulturists in your area or the University of California Cooperative Extension Service for plants best suited to our area.

5. Efficient Irrigation

Plants don't waste water, people do. Water early in the morning to minimize water loss due to evaporation. The sun is less intense and wind is likely to be light or absent. Water only when plants need it. Too much watering not only wastes water, but also can push nutrients away from the plant roots. This practice leads to more mowing, weeding, and pruning. Excess water also causes

development of shallow root systems and encourages more disease and insect problems. Plants in hot summer months need water only when they show signs of stress in the morning. Plants show stress in the afternoon due to the heat of the day and not necessarily the need for water.

Adjust sprinklers to water vegetation, not pavement, and sidewalks. Adjust automatic sprinklers to run at intervals appropriate for the season. Watering every day is often too much. Practice deep, infrequent watering to encourage deep root systems. Sprinklers at low pressures produce large drops of water rather than a fine spray and this minimizes evaporation loss. Drip irrigation works well in non-turf areas.

When installing a new irrigation system or upgrading an old system, we suggest you hire a licensed irrigation contractor. A listing of licensed landscape contractors is available at www.clca.org.

6. Use of Mulches

Use mulches wherever possible. Mulches reduce evaporation of water from the soil and limit weed growth. Mulches also help reduce erosion, help moderate soil temperatures, aid in good root development, eliminate weed growth, and add beauty. At least 3-4 inches of mulch should be maintained at all times under and around plants and trees. Replenish often since organic matter decomposes over time. Keep mulch from making direct contract with the trunks of trees or woody ornamentals. Extend mulch out to the drip line where possible.

7. Appropriate Maintenance

Remove weeds from lawns and gardens frequently. Weeds rob plants of valuable water. Check irrigation systems for leaks. Control insect and disease problems when they arise and feed and fertilize your plants only as needed. Mow grass frequently and keep the grass blade heights high.

Fertilization

Proper application of nutrients assures healthy plants. Too much fertilizer causes plants to require additional mowing and irrigation. Use a mulching mower and leave the lawn clippings in the lawn, instead of bagging. This enriches the soil and reduces fertilizer needs. Fertilizing once or twice a year is sufficient for most grasses and once a year is sufficient for other plants. Use 3-4 month slow release fertilizer for the best results.

Mowing

Mowing height for turfgrass affects watering needs. Less frequent watering is required for plant material mowed at its optimum height. Evaporation from the soil is also reduced with a longer leaf blade. Use sharp blades on mowers and do not remove more than one third of the leaf blade at each mowing.