

Published October 21st, 2015

## Saving the Garden ... and Water, Too

By Sophie Braccini



Mike Taylor on his trailer with water containers. Photo Jann Taylor

going, but we were concerned about the trees." The Lanes were willing to make as big an effort as possible to contribute to saving potable water for drinking use, so when they saw in the Central San newsletter, *The Pipeline*, that the agency was giving out free recycled water to residents, they looked into it and now go twice a week to Martinez, bringing back 150 gallons each time.

"We have had the recycled water program available for industrial and agricultural use for some time," says Central San project manager Nathan Hodges. "We decided to make it available for residents to get people used to recycled water." Hodges explains that the water coming out of the treatment plants is either sent to the San Francisco Bay, or is retreated before it is used as recycled water. "We recycle one and a half to two million gallons a day," says Hodges. "A part is used by ourselves in our treatment plant; other large users include the Pleasant Hill and Concord school districts that use it for their landscaping, local golf courses, and parks." He says that the Dublin San Ramon Services District was the first one to start recycling and using this water in the area.

In Moraga, Barbara and Tom Preston are also taking advantage of the free water to take care of a garden lush with plants and trees. "We first went to Central San with the trash cans we use to collect roof run-off, but were told that we needed containers with a screw-in lid," explains Barbara Preston, "so we bought drums that could fit in the back of the minivan." The Prestons go to Central San twice a week and get about 135 gallons of water each trip.

Once water is on site, the question became how to get the water to the garden. Since the Lanes' lot sits below the road, they simply use gravity to get the water flowing; the Prestons have a level lot so gravity was not an option. Instead, they created a simple system with a sump pump to transfer the water from Central San to different containers around their garden and they water their plants manually with hoses.

The Taylors in Lafayette, who travel many times each weekend to get between 1,500 and 2,000 gallons of water, had to get professional about their water handling. They use a trailer to haul the water, a maximum of 300 gallons a trip, which equals about 1.2 tons, not something any normal vehicle can handle safely. "We are maintaining a small orchard and a front yard (that includes a lawn)," says Jann Taylor. "Personally, we would love for Californians to recycle and reuse all our sanitized water." She notes that a large part of her weekend is dedicated to getting the water, something she does not see as sustainable. "If we do not get a good downpour of water with

Water restrictions can be painful. It is not easy for local gardeners to see the trees, annuals and perennials that were chosen with care, and grown with dedication, wither away. But several Lamorinda residents have found an innovative solution to lessen the pain: using free recycled water from the Central Contra Costa Sanitary district (Central San) to save all or part of their landscaping.

Passersby may have noticed small signs planted on front gardens that say: "Irrigated with free recycled water." The solution might be free, but it is not for everyone. It takes equipment and weekly trips to Martinez, but these residents are proving every day that you can save potable water and the garden at the same time.

"We wanted to save our trees, the citruses and the small maple," explains Lafayette resident Carolyn Lane. "We were not trying to get the lawn

El Nino this winter, the lawn might have to go," she says.

Edwin Oto also uses a trailer pulled by a small truck. He bought a 275-gallon container, at a cost of \$200, as well as a new powerful pump that gets him enough pressure to efficiently water his garden. He goes to Martinez twice a week.

As a young man in college, he visited a treatment plant where he learned about the safety and benefits of recycled water. "Some say that this water has more minerals than the tap water," says the Moraga resident. "This could be why the plants we water with it are doing so well."

Taylor agrees and adds that it is like using Miracle Grow all the time. "My roses look so healthy," she says. Oto and his wife don't feel that they needed a lawn; they consider it a waste of water and they took theirs out, "but we needed water to keep plants alive," he adds.

The sanitary district confirmed that recycled water is perfectly safe for the vegetable garden, though people should not drink it. "In Monterey County recycled water is used widely by commercial growers," says Hodges. "The water is perfectly safe to use for vegetable gardens; all you need is to wash your vegetables before eating them."

For information and to registration to participate in the program, visit <http://centralsan.org/index.cfm?navid=1348>.



Edwin Oto uses recycled water in his garden. Photos Sophie Bracinni



Bobbie and Tom Preston's garden

Reach the reporter at: [sophie@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:sophie@lamorindaweekly.com)

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA