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Saving Water, Money and Pollinators: It All Begins at Home

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Don and Lynn Ireland

By Don Ireland

Don Ireland is the volunteer president of Third Cherry Creek Townhouse Corp. of Denver. His efforts have led to the 251-unit homeowner's association winning multiple conservation awards and roles in two environmental films.

Nearly 10 years ago, I took an interest to my new neighborhood, Cherry Creek Three in southeast Denver. I quickly learned our monthly water and sewage bills were devouring about 42% of our budget. Today, people know us as the HOA that saved 15 million gallons of water in a single year and revamped much of its landscaping to feature beautiful native and xeric plants that attract a colorful array of birds, butterflies, hummingbirds and pollinators every season.



Before and after shot of a garden transformed by the Third Cherry Creek HOA

It's taken years and the work is ongoing. Along the way, our modest condo community has become the first multi-family development in Colorado history to be named a Habitat Hero and win Colorado WaterWise and Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment awards.

Here are some of the steps we've taken to change our little part of the world and hope you will consider these changes for where you live:

- **Educate everyone of the importance and value of water:** It isn't free and it isn't in ever-abundant supply. The Colorado water plan predicts that a population growing from the current 5.3 million people to roughly 10 million by 2050 could render as many as 2.5 million people parched. Realizing the importance of using every drop wisely will lead to reduced water consumption – and lower water and sewage bills, too.
- **Change your indoor water devices:** Many water suppliers will give you a rebate for replacing old toilets with water-saving high-efficiency toilets. Newer dishwashers and front-loading washers bearing the WaterSense logo save water, too.
- **View your yard differently:** Lush, well-manicured blue grass lawns were a status symbol in the 1920s. It is a custom that has continued for generations but needs to be tempered. I'm not for lawn-less yards, I'm for less-lawn yards. Many people in Colorado are unaware of a 2005 law that prohibits HOAs from mandating blue grass lawns.
- **Change your yard:** Replace unused blue grass sections with native plants. They thrive in this region; use the water nature provides them and supplies food and shelter for pollinators. Plant Select has a list of plant species that will thrive in Colorado. It offers free garden designs at plantselect.org.
- **Replace old sprinkler heads** with better technology including MP rotar heads. Many water authorities will give you a rebate for them.

Yes, I'm pleased that we're saving tons of water. However, I'm equally delighted when I hear my neighbors talk about the Monarch butterflies and hummingbirds they've seen. People from other neighborhoods now take their evening walks in our HOA to enjoy the wide selection of plants and watch our owners who participate in a community garden that was a nearly-worthless patch of blue grass five years ago.