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LIVE SMARTER

# Native Plants Helped a Colorado Neighborhood Save 15 Million Gallons of Water a Year

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ROBYN BECK/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

As droughts have worsened in the western U.S., residents have had to contend with a question of landscaping. Grass and other traditional fixtures of residential gardens require a lot of water to stay green. Just ask Don Ireland, who has spent years spearheading water-saving techniques in his neighborhood. According to *Audubon*, his efforts have helped save 15 million gallons of water per year.

When Ireland first joined the Cherry Creek 3 Townhomes Homeowners Association upon moving to Denver, he was shocked at how much money the association was spending on its water bills. He set about getting his neighbors to improve their water-using habits in part by redesigning their gardens. For five years, he helped tear out the juniper bushes, grass, and rock gardens that dotted the community and replaced them with drought-tolerant plants native to Colorado's high desert environment, plants that didn't require extra water on a regular basis.



Don Ireland replaced his own lawn with a colorful garden filled with native plants.

The results of the project—which also included things like installing high-efficiency toilets and other appliances—are impressive. In 2008 and 2009, the community used 37 million gallons of water each year. By 2014, the neighborhood was using 20 to 22 million gallons, saving \$100,000 a year and enough water to fill the local swimming pool 138 times over.

Ireland's case proves how valuable native plants can be, but he's not the only one crusading for homeowners to plant them. In California, water agencies have been offering rebates over the past several years to homeowners who rip out their water-guzzling lawns in favor of drought-friendly plants (though the process has not always gone smoothly). And while replanting landscaping with plants that have been bred to survive in that area does save a lot of water, the other part of the equation, installing high-efficiency appliances, has a huge effect on water usage, too. In 2015, an audit in Los Angeles found that every dollar spent on rebates for high-efficiency appliances resulted in approximately five times more water savings than a dollar spent on turf replacement.

*[h/t Audubon]*