TreePeople

sustainablesolutions

growing a greener city

Getting the Lay of the Land

Did you know that Los Angeles has plenty of water? Okay, we'll likely always have to import some. But, if we changed a few of our habits, especially with our landscapes, we could greatly reduce our demand. We don't have a water quantity issue; it's the way we manage our water that really has to change.

Each of our actions affects our watershed. Our local water supply is increased when our watershed feeds underground aquifers and channels water into rivers. When water is unable to get into the ground, it is wasted and creates polluted urban runoff. If we capture or redirect rainwater into the landscape, we could meet a substantial portion of our water needs locally. This valuable water helps to cut back on your water use, which provides savings on your water bill! What's not to love about that.

Mapping your yard is the first step in identifying simple changes to using less water. This first step should take about 20 to 30 minutes, so grab a pencil, paper, tape measure, a cool drink and head outside!

1. Draw an outline of your house and property with the street at the bottom of the page.
   - Include the driveway, patios, walkways, and any other "hardscape." (Tip: If you're feeling techie, you can use the satellite image feature of Google maps to help you.)
2. Determine which direction your home faces. Add a compass rose to the top of your map showing: East (E), the direction the sun rises; west (W), the direction the sun sets; north (N); and south (S).
3. Measure the distance from property line to property line. Mark the distance on your map, in feet.
4. Draw a small circle for the trunks of existing trees. Use dots to indicate the dripline (the tree perimeter marked by the ends of the branches).
5. Using a dashed line, indicate the location of overhead utilities (phone, cable) and underground utilities (sewer, gas, water). You can find out where underground lines exist by calling DigAlert at (800) 227-2600.

(continued...)

"I've mapped my yard, as instructed by TreePeople, although, I'm not sure I used the right 'cold drink.' I already run water in buckets while waiting for the shower to warm up, or while washing my face, so the idea of my yard wasting water just irks me.

The mapping was an eye opener, though. It turns out we've been using my neighbor's garage."

- Paula Poundstone, Comedian

TreePeople's Sustainable Solutions Program is dedicated to landscape transformation - turning yards into functional landscapes that are beautiful and sustainable. Our monthly guides and checklists detail an easy, step-by-step process, helping us all create a healthy urban forest where water is valued, air is clean, soil is healthy and trees are thriving.

Next Month: Rain chains & downspout extensions

Linda's List

Linda Eremita, TreePeople's Senior ISA Certified Arborist, has the following suggestions for your May gardening fun:

Climate Appropriate Plant of the Month

Ray Hartman ceanothus (*Ceanothus* 'Ray Hartman')

This fast-growing shrub can reach 18' to 20' in three to five years! It can also be pruned into a tree form. Beautiful blue flowers bloom on the branch ends throughout spring. Very low water-use makes it a great choice for valley areas or near the coast. Hummingbirds and butterflies love when you include this in your garden. Give it a well-drained soil, full sun and little or no summer water and it will thrive.

Upcoming Workshop

June 13, 2010 - Pest Management

Photo courtesy of Linda Eremita

Out-of-the-Box

L.A.'s Low Impact Development

The City of Los Angeles Board of Public Works passed the Low Impact Development (LID) Ordinance. It now goes on to the next step in the approval process. This ordinance requires new developments and significant redevelopment projects to capture, reuse, infiltrate or treat the first 3/4" of rain that falls on a site by using a variety of water infiltration and capturing techniques to help manage storm-water (ex. rain gardens, bioswales, rain barrels, permeable pavement, redirected downspouts).

Are You a Renter?

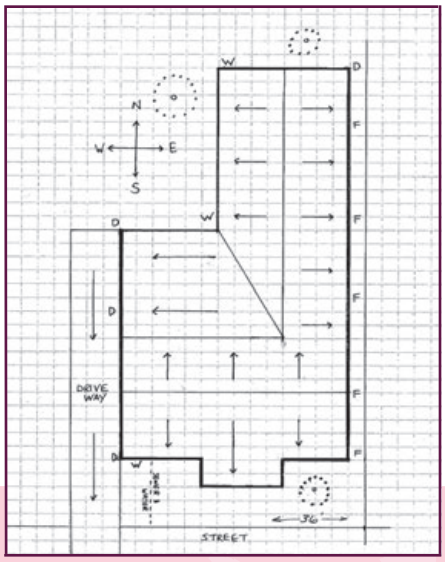
You too can map out your surroundings. Look for places where you work, go to school, or even places of worship - most locations have a need to redirect water away from the street and into the landscape.

Check with the property owners. Explain the need to capture water and how you will be learning a variety of ways to help save water!

Mapping Your Yard Continued...

6. Indicate the following on your map (see below for example):
   - Downspouts that direct rain from the roof – D
   - Sprinkler heads in the lawn and garden – S
   - Outdoor water faucets – W
   - Areas that flood– F

7. Draw arrows that show the direction that water flows:
   - Where does the water from your roof go?
   - Where does the water drain from concrete or other impervious surfaces?
   - Where does the water from downspouts flow?
   - Turn on sprinklers. Does the water stay on the grass or planting beds, or does it flow into the street?



That's it! Keep your map handy and use it in the coming months as we explore a variety of water capture, retention, and saving features you can install in your yard. Now kick back and enjoy another beautiful day in L.A.!