

the dirt



SUMMER 2020 GARDENING NEWSLETTER

Greener than grass.

Science has brought us a fast-growing, no-fuss, eco-smart California lawn alternative from Japan.

Want to save water, but still love the look of grass? Consider kurapia (*Lippia nodiflora* L. 'Kurapia'), a low-water-use, low-maintenance turf alternative.

It's speedy

You can buy and install this versatile groundcover as sod or individual plugs. When planted as plugs—the most economical way—kurapia gets right to work, filling the planted area in just a couple of months.

It's versatile, not thirsty

Kurapia uses 60% less water than cool-season grass such as fescue, and tolerates light foot traffic. It stays green year-round and can be mowed for a manicured look. But if you leave it natural, it will grow only about an inch high, with little white flowers. Kurapia is bred to be sterile, so it is noninvasive. It is fireproof and has an extensive root system, making it an excellent plant for erosion control on slopes.



So why haven't you heard of it?

It's new. Kurapia was bred from a native Japanese plant and has been extensively tested by University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources Cooperative Extension researchers.

- **To see this plant live**, visit IRWD's recently installed kurapia demonstration garden at 15600 Sand Canyon Ave., Irvine.
- **For more information**, visit kurapia.com.



Replacing your grass lawn? You might be eligible for a money-saving IRWD rebate. See RightScapeNow.com/rebates.

You have what it takes for quality compost.



Greg Stevenson

Greg Stevenson | Master Gardener

A computer programmer by profession and edible gardener by passion, Greg produces gardening videos and speaks frequently on behalf of Master Gardeners of Orange County. Nearly everything growing at his home is edible, even the weeds.

IRWD: What got you interested in composting?

Stevenson: Quality organic compost is important to me since I eat what I grow.

IRWD: Is this something people can do in suburban Orange County?

Stevenson: Yes. Most O.C. homes do not generate enough plant material for the most efficient form of composting, but everyone can do it. Even a little bit can do a lot. I recommend vermicomposting (composting with worms) for kitchen scraps. It's easy and provides the best quality compost you can get.

IRWD: What supplies do you need?

Stevenson: Composting can be done with no supplies at all. Just gather plant material into a pile and let it decompose. All it needs is a little air and moisture. I made a simple 3-by-3-foot bin by nailing some pallets together. It keeps things organized and promotes faster decomposition. Use a plastic tote for vermicomposting.

IRWD: Where can people learn more?

Stevenson: The UCCE Master Gardeners of Orange County has a Composting Video Series at bit.ly/compost-video that provides a lot of good information. Or visit mgorange.ucanr.edu.



Compost bin made from pallets

Embrace your inner garden design guru.

Looking into gardening but don't know where to start?

We have a few ideas to jump-start your inspiration. Check out these sustainable landscape renovation ideas for weekend projects and visit RightScapeResources.com for more recommendations.

1. Identify garden rooms and their function. There are a distinct set of garden “rooms” at your home, whether it’s the back patio and back hillside or the front entry and side yard planter. Determine their primary use and explore elements to make them more beautiful and sustainable. Designing a garden room will delight you and your family all year.



2. Improve your soil. Healthy soil is the foundation of a healthy landscape. To give your garden the best opportunity to flourish, work partially decomposed organic material into the soil to a good depth. When you amend the soil with compost, you allow water to more easily reach the root system of plants.



3. Remove unnecessary turf. Too often, grass is used where it is not needed. Turf should be avoided on hillsides and tiny pocket spaces. If you have a narrow side yard, adding a stepping-stone or an alternative-surface walkway is a good way to minimize turf in a sustainable way.

4. Add hardscape. Elements such as decks, fences, gates, arbors and patios can play a role in sustainability. Look into creating a sustainable landscape that can work to keep water on the property. Dry creek beds are a great option, providing overflow grading and giving your property a place to collect water.



Juan's tip of the season.

Eco-friendly pest management

It's that time of year when your garden is in full gear—and possibly crawling with pests. Rather than attacking them with toxic chemicals, first try eco-friendly options. Remember, insects aren't always bad. Beneficial insects help control problems and serve as pollinators. Here are some nontoxic tips from our very own UC Master Gardeners:

- Hand pick insects off plants.
- Use insect barriers and traps that are sticky.
- Spray with a strong stream of water or insecticidal soap.

To learn more, see the UC Statewide Integrated Pest Management Program, ipm.ucanr.edu/FAQ/mglesstoxic.html.

Looking ahead.

Summer garden to-do list

- **Evaluate your irrigation system:** Check for breaks and leaks. Consider retrofitting with modern technology such as rotor spray heads, drip irrigation or weather-based controllers, which all save water.
- **Mulch:** Few things brighten a garden more than mulch. It's like filling in color between the lines with crayons. By adding a couple of lines of decomposing soil amendment, you minimize evaporation and deter weeds.
- **Prepare to reduce your watering:** September is the time to water 30% less. Your plants notice the days getting shorter and enter their dormant phase. Follow the schedule at WateringGuide.com.

RightScape resources

All the resources you need to get started building your water-efficient landscape are available at RightScapeNow.com, including information on events and classes (currently held online). Our experts will share detailed information on how to plant a water-efficient landscape. Plus, check out our plant database at RightScapeResources.com.

Outdoor rebates

IRWD will help offset costs as you move to a water-efficient yard. We'll help you with turf removal, weather-based irrigation controllers, efficient sprinkler heads, drip kits and more. Details at RightScapeNow.com.

About The Dirt

The Dirt is a new, quarterly gardening resource from Irvine Ranch Water District, created to help you grow a more beautiful, water-efficient garden. Each newsletter will bring you seasonal tips to keep plants thriving all year long.

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