

Meetings and Announcements

UCCE Kern County Office Situation--Reopening

UC Cooperative Extension offices throughout California are now open to the public with masks required for visitors unvaccinated, although they were never really closed while most staff were working remotely. Email will still be a good way to reach me, jfkarlik@ucanr.edu.

Fall Horticulture Classes?

In the fall, I have customarily offered one or two horticulture classes, although Covid shut us down last year. It is possible I could offer specific topics or a series of topics, and I've received a couple of requests to offer something. If you have an idea or would like to offer any feedback, please send me an email, jfkarlik@ucanr.edu. I welcome your input.

Landscape Design and Aesthetic Choices

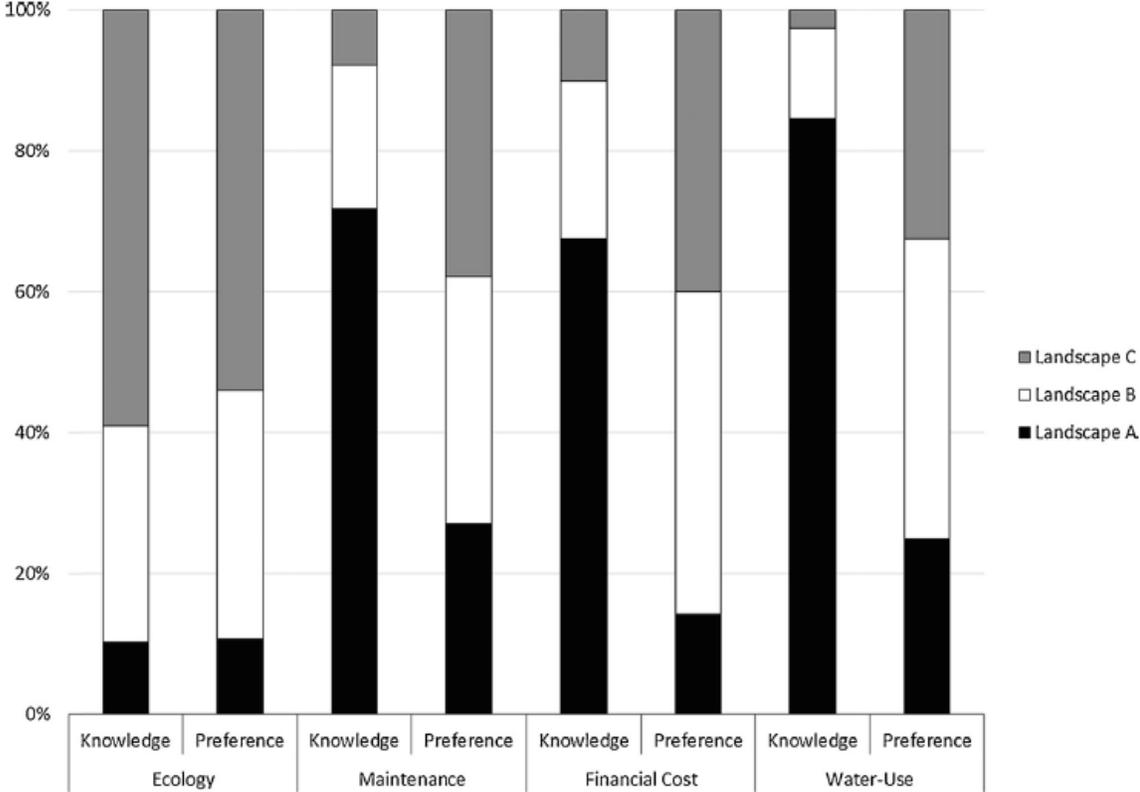
As we move forward into a very dry California, and another warm summer, there may be changes needed in terms of the amount of irrigation and nature of landscape maintenance desired. Maintenance requirement begins with design. I ran this article a year ago, but it is even more relevant now.

There was a very interesting paper published about landscapes and why people prefer certain styles to others. I'd like to mention aspects of that paper for your interest. (The full citation is Hayden, L.; Cadenasso, M.L.; Haver, D.; and L.R. Oki. 2015. Residential landscape aesthetics and water conservation best management practices: Homeowner perceptions and preferences. *Landscape and Urban Planning* 144: 1-9.)

The three demonstration landscapes shown below were planted at the UC South Coast Research & Extension Center. They represent different plant types and approaches toward water conservation. Type A represents something typical—you've likely seen a landscape like this with turfgrass comprising much of the surface area. Type B is a move toward a more Mediterranean look, with less turf and use of shrubs. Type C moves further toward a natural landscape, that is, one more closely resembling the ecosystem of California. We notice the use of mulch and absence of turf. There are other features, too, that aren't so obvious, such as the use of slot drains in the driveway of B (and presumably C) and the use of drip irrigation in C.



After a field day at the UC center, visitors were given a survey to gauge their knowledge and preference for the landscape types. Some of the data are shown here:



In this figure, “knowledge” means how much respondents thought they knew about the landscape in relation to the criterion. For example, respondents were confident about their knowledge of water use in A, the financial cost of A, and the maintenance of A. “Preference” means how much respondents liked the landscape type.

I want to call out a few highlights of the responses. Overall, respondents strongly preferred Landscape B, which contained an intermediate level of best management practices. The B type was also the type most closely matching their home landscape for most people. However, when asked about specific features of the landscapes, such as use of plants, plant choices, drip irrigation, and so forth, the components of Landscape C prevailed. Also, with regard to water use, Landscape C was chosen over the others. So why wasn’t Landscape C chosen overall?

In a paper published in 2008 (let me know if you want the full citation), it was found that homeowners would compromise water conservation and costs to achieve what they think is aesthetically attractive. Part of the homeowner rationale is about what sort of landscape the neighbors have and how they think the neighbors will react, in other words, feeling a sort of neighbor peer pressure. (I find that interesting, since in converse the neighbors are probably concerned about what the homeowner thinks of them.)

One conclusion we may draw is that to move toward additional water savings, either people have to make landscaping changes with less regard to how they think the neighbors will react, or that aesthetic norms have to change—what looks good. Said another way, what is considered to be desirable and attractive in a landscape will have to change if deeper cuts in water use are to be attained. As an example, in Bakersfield it seems people often prefer bare soil beneath shrubs because it looks “neat,” but mulching clearly lowers evaporation and improves conditions for plant roots.

There is much more in the Hayden paper, and if you’re in the business of landscape design or water conservation, I suggest you read it in full.

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Environmental Horticulture/Environmental Science

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