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University of California
Agriculture and Natural Resources
Making a Difference for California

The Green Scene

UCCE

July 2020

Greetings

I hope you're doing well amidst whatever level of shutdown and activity you are experiencing.

Meetings and Announcements

UCCE Kern County Office Situation—But, UCCE is still working!

Our office on Mt. Vernon Ave. is currently open to the public. In accordance with the public health emergency declared by the County of Kern, all visitors are required to wear face coverings in all public places until further notice. Many of us advisors will be alternately in the office and working from home, and I have answered many questions via email, and new queries come in regularly from Kern residents as well as from those who live much further away. Email is the best way to reach me, my address is jfkarlik@ucanr.edu.

Weekly Zoom Presentation: Gardens and Design

I am making weekly Zoom presentations on gardens and landscape design, augmented with a bit of history. These presentations are weekly, Thursdays, at 4:30 pm, and are based on photos from our past horticultural tours. The next presentation, July 23, will show and discuss landscapes and gardens of the Ratchaphruek exhibition that was held in Thailand in late 2006 – early 2007. That exhibition far surpassed the expectations of the Thai government and those who organized it. Everyone on this mailing list should receive weekly a note with the Zoom meeting number and password.

Fall Horticulture Classes?

In the fall, I customarily offer one or two horticulture classes. This is a very different year, and I don't know when we will be able to offer classes that meet in-person. It is possible I could offer specific topics or a series of topics via Zoom, perhaps an hour per topic. If you have an idea or would like to offer any feedback, please send me an email, jfkarlik@ucanr.edu. I welcome your input.

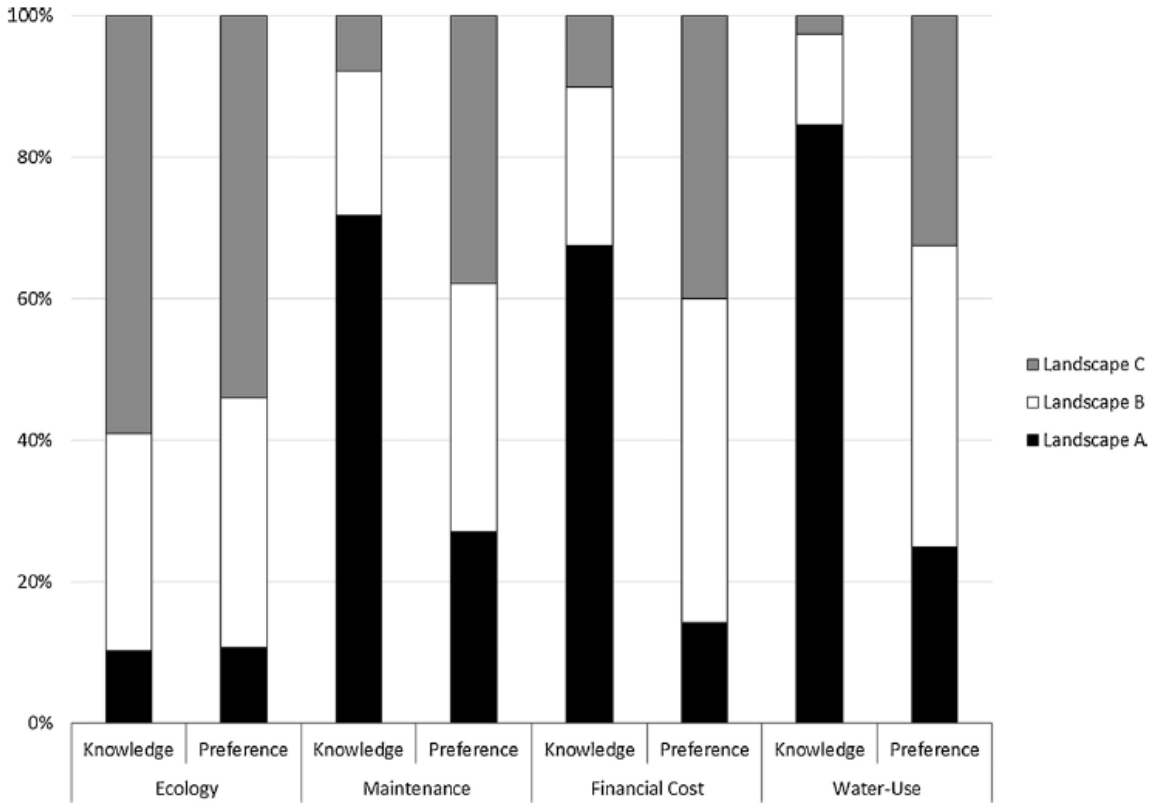
Landscape Design and Aesthetic Choices

As we move forward into a world affected by Covid, and some ultimate aftermath, there may be changes needed in terms of the amount and nature of landscape maintenance desired. Maintenance requirement begins with design.

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 above were planted at the UC South Coast Research & Extension Center. They represent different plant types and approaches toward additional 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 SoCal. Use of mulch and absence of turf are features. 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 other 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 their rationale is what the neighbors have and what they think the neighbors will think, since most people seem unwilling to do something quite different from their neighbors. (I find that interesting, since probably in converse the neighbors are concerned about what others think 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 they'll be perceived, or that the aesthetic norms have to change. In other words, what is considered to be desirable, even 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.

Slime Mold

A few days ago, someone sent me an email with a beautiful photo of slime mold. I don't use that photo here, but rather my own.

The extended warm and sometimes humid weather in July can favor the development of slime molds. As their name suggests, slime molds were long classified as a form of fungi, but have been reclassified to be within a subkingdom within the Protista (the reclassification of little practical importance). Slime mold is usually found on the surface of turf, and occasionally organic matter, but does not injure the underlying turf or injure other plants. The organism responsible for slime mold is multinucleate and moves up and into the leaves of turf, something like a giant amoeba, and is often a frothy yellow or orange color. When conditions dry, such as in the afternoon, the mass becomes gray and dusty as spores are formed. People who first encounter a slime mold often think it is vomit from a dog or other animal. Despite their rather disgusting appearance, slime molds are quite harmless and can be removed with a garden hose.

John Karlik
Environmental Horticulture/Environmental Science

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