

Artificial grass looks great and saves water

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Posted: 05/22/2009 05:38:11 PM PDT

Robert and Corinne Linke used to have a lawn like many of their neighbors in West Covina, but last year the Linkes decided to install water-saving artificial grass.

Several factors played a part in the decision, Corinne Linke said. Her husband injured his back and could no longer garden, and the couple became aware of a worsening drought and wanted to do their part in conserving water.

After purchasing artificial grass last year from AGL Grass of Southern California, they're happy with the results.



"We've had people stop and get out of their cars and check if it's real," she said. "It just looks too nice."

With awareness of the region's water crisis growing, water agencies like the Metropolitan Water District, which provides water to 26 cities and water districts, have been offering incentives for residents to conserve, and people like the Linkes have been getting the message loud and clear.

The public information campaign and the rebate program have been working well - perhaps a little too well.

MWD funds for rebate programs that encourage replacing water-thirsty lawns with artificial turf, or purchasing water-saving appliances, began running out quickly earlier this year, as residents lined up for rebate checks.

"Right now the MWD has exhausted all the funds so our rebates are no longer in existence," said Kristeen Ramirez, spokeswoman for San Bernardino County's Cucomonga Water District. "Our customers are really active with the rebates."

More than 2,500 San Bernardino County customers were given rebates this fiscal year, up until April, said Steve Arakawa, MWD water resources group manager. About 400 rebates were doled out in the San Gabriel Valley.

But the MWD's program is on hold for now, until the agency approaches its board in mid-June to ask for a rebate budget revamp.

"We are going through some growing pains with our program," he said. "We are identifying areas where we need to make adjustments because the money doesn't actually meet the need."

Some water districts still have money to distribute in rebates, including the Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District, which serves much of the west San Gabriel Valley - from Covina and La Puente to South Pasadena and San Gabriel.

That district has given out 1,324 rebates so far this fiscal year, some for high-efficiency toilets and washing machines.

"The program has been very successful," said spokesman Peter Rodriguez. "Our program is still going because we still have some money left."

Arakawa said while the MWD's program is on hold, residents should check with their local water districts to see about other rebate possibilities.

The MWD plans to continue to encourage customers to conserve water, he added.

"We're constantly looking for new tools and appropriate means to keep existing conservation going," Arakawa said.

Even though rebate money is sparse, officials stress that the water shortage and need for water conservation by everyone remains dire.

"Conservation needs to be the new normal," Ramirez said. "The point we're at right now, it's not going to be a temporary change. We're dealing with this situation now and we may be dealing with it for a long time."

For more tips on water conservation and more information, visit www.bewaterwise.com.

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