

A yard that's easy to maintain

Blooming plants, a large variety of shrubs and a dry stream make this garden in Los Osos visually interesting throughout the year

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This vibrant Los Osos garden, designed by **Suzanne Morrison of Earthscapes**, demonstrates that low-maintenance gardens aren't necessarily boring. From the curb-side overview, where masses of low-growing Asteriscus "gold coin" are backed by mounds of rosemary plus the blue and purple spikes of English lavender and Mexican sage, visitors are drawn to explore further.

A palette of blues and yellows is repeated throughout the garden, enlivened by the burgundy-red foliage of New Zealand flax, red fountain grass and purple hop seed bush, and by touches of pink, including masses of white-to-pink Santa Barbara daisies. Blue shades range from the pale lavender puffs of Melaleuca nesophylla to the cobalt blue panicles of "dark star" Ceanothus. Yellow highlights are provided by yarrow, lantana and Euryops pectinatus. Creamy white California bush anemone and fortnight lily (Dietes) brighten some areas.



The owners requested a low-maintenance garden with a dry creek, an arbor as a focal point for the backyard, well-defined pathways and a naturalistic appearance. The lot had been cleared of most vegetation when the house was built four years ago, but clusters of native manzanita and a row of myoporum trees remained.

With the addition of six mature trees (three oaks and three nonfruiting olives) and boulders already growing moss, the garden acquired an immediate sense of maturity. The dry stream is functional, channeling rainwater from the



downspouts. As it flows away from a rear corner of the house, a stream is bridged with a slab of slate. The stream curves and widens in a natural manner alongside the oaks, around a sedge meadow and toward the street, terminating in a grouping of boulders.



The arrangement of rocks, grasses and grass-like plants along the dry stream is very naturalistic. Grasses include red fountain grass, blue oat grass and six-foot-tall feather reed grass. There are several varieties each of sedges, rushes and New Zealand flax.



A substantial wooden arbor shades a circular cobblestone patio with a low retaining wall that also serves as seating. Two olive trees lend dappled shade and a sense of enclosure. Eventually, the row of Euryops shrubs behind the retaining wall will become a solid backdrop, and the native Toyon trees beyond will completely screen the neighboring chain-link fence while providing bright red berries to attract birds.

This garden exemplifies the garden design motto “unity with diversity.” Continuity is achieved through the repeated use of colors and plant forms (in this case, mounded and spiky) throughout the garden. Whereas repetition unifies the

various parts of the garden, the singular use of specimen plants adds diversity and draws attention to special areas. The path to the front door is highlighted by blue beach aster, red-leaved Loropetalum “Razzleberri” and a meticulously pruned Melaleuca. Golden breath of heaven illuminates the stairway.

**GARDEN DESIGN TIPS FROM
SUZANNE MORRISON**

PLANTS IN MASSES

Plants have more impact in loose rows or clusters than singly.

BE CONSISTENT

Create continuity by repeating colors and plant shapes throughout the garden.

SHOWCASE PIECES

Highlight special plantings by their placement and by outdoor lighting.

SAVE YOUR BACK

To reduce maintenance, avoid plants that require frequent pruning or dead-heading. This garden requires just eight hours a month to maintain.

