

Episode Eighteen: Gnome and Garden



In their 18th episode, the Garden Wise Guys have gone missing! GWTV news reporters Dana Halverson and Dominique Blocker start a city-wide search for the two landscape architects, and discover informative water-wise ideas and facts along the way. From replacing lawns with green alternatives, to healthier soil, join Billy Goodnick and Owen Dell, as they say goodbye, and a new chapter begins for the Garden Wise Guys show.

The episode takes the “Garden Wise Guys” hosts Billy Goodnick and Owen Dell on a journey with garden gnomes, beginning with being surrounded by creepy gnomes, then reported missing, and ultimately transformed into a pair of gnomes themselves. (Another interpretation is simply that they couldn’t pass up an opportunity to showcase their senses of humor in their last appearance on the show after eight years of hosting). As Dana and Dominique search for the hosts, we are taken to several sites.

At the first site, Carol Bornstein, author of “Reimagining the California Lawn,” designed the low-water-use site where Goodnick and Dell were reportedly last seen. Goodnick and Dell were nowhere to be found, but Bornstein did point out that lawns consume most of the irrigation water that’s applied in California. She encouraged the installation of lawn alternatives, such as Blue Chalk Stick, also known as Blue Finger (*Senecio [kleinia] mandraliscae*), Clustered Field Sedge (*Carex praegracilis*), and Mountain Sedge (*Carex scopulorum*). Lawn alternatives and other water-wise plants can be seen on the online interactive program “Water Wise Gardening in Santa Barbara County,” at www.sbwater.org.

With Bornstein’s help, homeowner Greg Moore replaced the lawn in his front yard with water-wise plants “mainly to cut down on the water use of the lawn itself.” He also wanted to go with native plants to provide habitat for insects, birds, and other wildlife while showcasing what he’d like to see in other landscapes, rather than “boring” turf. He pointed out that his water use for three people, one part-time, has ranged from only 1 to 3 hundred cubic foot, or hcf, monthly, compared to the city average homeowner use of 13 hcf monthly.



News announcer Halverson came back on the screen reporting a tip that Goodnick was seen raving about the benefits of buffalograss. On-the-scene reporter Blocker rushed to the location. Although she couldn’t find Goodnick, she did find the benefits of UC Verde Buffalograss, courtesy of Daniel Wilson of Wilson Environmental Landscape Design, and Tom Hawkins, president of Florasource LTD. Wilson explained UC Verde Buffalograss’s roots, described how hardy it is and how little water it uses. Compared to average turf, which requires weekly watering, Wilson said UC Verde Buffalo Grass can get by on a monthly dousing, and only in the summer.

Hawkins described UC Verde Buffalograss, which was specially formulated out of the University of California, Davis, to thrive in California’s climate. He referred to ucverde.com as a source to find UC Verde vendors.



Next, News Announcer Halverson sent Blocker to Santa Barbara City College, where, again, Dell and Goodnick could not be found, but Mike Gonella, chair instructor of the Environmental Horticulture Department, who teaches sustainable gardening practices, was on hand to talk about the Lifescape Garden -- specifically, how well developed the soil is there. Most soil in this area is clay. Gonella said the soil at Lifescape has been made rich through a mix of clay soil, silt, sand and organic material.



News flash: Halverson reported a van outside the home of a participant in the Smart Landscape Rebate Program. The Smart Landscape Rebate Program offers rebates on 50 percent of the cost of materials that upgrade irrigation efficiency, change to water wise plants and for mulch.

Janet Reid, of the Villa Miradero Homeowners Association, said her complex had a 1970s landscape of grass and agapanthus, with a 1970s irrigation system, which included a timer that the gardener had to turn on and off manually. Among the improvements eligible for a rebate for half the cost: a smart irrigation controller. Smart irrigation controllers, which automatically adjust sprinkler times based on the weather, are now required under the state's new Green Building Code and are part of the City of Santa Barbara's Landscape Design Standards.



Villa Miradero also hired a designer and went through a transparent process allowing residents to see what was next in the development and installation of the project. Some were hesitant to accept their perception of water-wise plants. But the new landscape included low-water-use grass, lavender and poppies, and has been a draw for hummingbirds and butterflies, Reid said.

Just in case viewers began to wonder about comic relief, they were given a final look at Goodnick and Dell looking suspiciously like gnomes. For their final ha ha, they signed off with one last pair of cream pies in their eyes.

