

Garden Grove School celebrates its ‘outdoor laboratory’: water-efficient landscaping as educational as it is scenic



Bolsa Grande High School reveals their new landscaping during a ceremony at the school in Garden Grove on Monday, October 22, 2018. Bolsa Grande was one of three schools in the Garden Grove Unified School District to receive a grant from the State of California to install storm water management with a drought-tolerant landscape. (Photo by Leonard Ortiz, Orange County Register/SCNG)

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PUBLISHED: October 23, 2018 at 4:44 pm | UPDATED: October 23, 2018 at 4:45 pm

Laying eyes on the tranquil garden that stretches between two corridors at Bolsa Grande High, the first question that comes to mind might be: How can I make my yard look like this?

Where once was only trampled grass, some 1,400 graceful yet hardy plants now flaunt their understated beauty. A dry, pebble-bottomed creek harbors its own array of grasses and flora.

Although still nascent, the oasis fits in as though it simply belongs there – which it does. From the lantana to the salvia to the California sycamore trees to the feathered muhly grass, all the plants are native to this neck of the woods.



A student walks past the new landscaping at Bolsa Grande High School in Garden Grove on Monday, October 22, 2018. Bolsa Grande was one of three schools in the Garden Grove Unified School District to receive a grant from the State of California to install storm water management with a drought-tolerant landscape. (Photo by Leonard Ortiz, Orange County Register/SCNG)

The 11,000-square-foot garden was funded by a grant from the California State Water Resources Control Board to make school grounds more water-efficient.

Garden Grove Unified nabbed \$2 million of the \$25 million dispersed by the state for its Drought Response Outreach Program for Schools (DROPS), established in 2014. Three district high schools are participating – Bolsa Grande, Los Amigos and Santiago.

Costa Mesa landscape architecture firm Nuvis designed several gardens at each campus.

In total, Bolsa Grande scored 33,300 square feet of DROPS landscaping; Los Amigos, 24,700; and Santiago, 21,500. Nonprofit Orange County Coastkeeper has provided curriculum and training at the high schools.

On Monday, Oct. 22, Bolsa Grande students and teachers celebrated their beautified quad area with a ceremony attended by district and city officials.

AP environmental science teacher Jerid Johnson took the podium to explain how the transformation of the “outdoor laboratory” has been a learning experience for his charges – including members of the after-school program Wilderness Adventure Club, or WAC.

Before the gardens got underway, Johnson said, students collected baseline data that they now can compare to current data. The young scientists took water and soil samples to check for contaminants. They also counted pollinators such as butterflies and hummingbirds, and they measured the volume of rain that flowed over concrete headed directly for the ocean.

“We need rainwater to get underground as soon as possible so that it won’t run off into storm drains,” Johnson said, as a hummingbird flitted about the salvia.

Senior Cortney Norasing, 17, introduced herself as WAC’s “garden guardian.”

“I go around and pick up trash and make sure my cute little plants are healthy and happy,” she said, before launching into a college-like lecture about ecosystems and pH levels.

Nuvis husband-and-wife team Robert and Janet Stone led a tour pointing out the water-saving features of their project. The sloping man-made “creek,” officially called a swale, acts to hold rainwater until it can seep into the ground. The plant choices attract the critical critters that spread pollen. A permeable, decomposed granite pathway discourages runoff.

And as a big bonus, Janet Stone added, the plants take care of themselves – no mowing or leaf-blowing necessary.

“In fact, we discourage any trimming,” she said. “Just let them grow in a natural way.”

It’s yet another incentive to try this at home.me.



Bolsa Grande High teacher Jerid Johnson, right, who was responsible for implementing the DROPS program (Drought Response Outreach Program for Schools) speaks during a ceremony at the school to reveal their new landscaping in Garden Grove on Monday, October 22, 2018.

(Photo by Leonard Ortiz, Orange County Register/SCNG)



Janet Stone, a landscape architect with Nuvis Landscape Architecture, takes a photo of the new landscaping at Bolsa Grande High School in Garden Grove on Monday, October 22, 2018. Nuvis Landscape Architecture was the firm that designed and built the landscaping for Bolsa Grande High School after GGUSD received a grant from the State of California to install stormwater management with a drought-tolerant landscape. (Photo by Leonard Ortiz, Orange County Register/SCNG)



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Robert Stone, center, of Nuvis Landscape Architecture points out features of the new landscaping Bolsa Grande High School in Garden Grove on Monday, October 22, 2018. Nuvis Landscape Architecture was the firm that designed and built the landscaping for Bolsa Grande High School after GGUSD received a grant from the State of California to install stormwater management with a drought-tolerant landscape. (Photo by Leonard Ortiz, Orange County Register/SCNG)(Photo by Leonard Ortiz, Orange County Register/SCNG)