

Best Green Business

Marizco Landscape Management

By Matt Solis

They're images we see every day and usually take for granted: the perfectly manicured lawn and gushing water fountain in front of a massive office building; the vibrant plants and flowers framing the entrance to an industrial park. With recent surges in green technology, much has been made of sustainable farming and grape growing practices, but what of sustainable landscaping? Enter Marizco Landscape Management (MLM), winner of this year's Best Green Business award.

"This is very exciting," says President/CEO Pierre Marizco. "I feel the company has worked hard to achieve sustainable status, and we certainly don't take [awards like this] for granted. It's really an honor." A veteran of the industry for more than 20 years, Marizco started MLM in 2004 with an ideological vision of maintaining serene settings while being respectful of the environment. "In the past," he explains, "the industry trend was to manage landscapes *without* being environmentally responsible, like using

harsh pesticides that sterilized soil. I wanted to find a way to be environmentally responsible and still find ways to reduce client costs."

Those goals eventually led to MLM taking an educational approach to landscaping. "We focus on educating clients so they can become more sustainable," says Marizco. "Many clients come to us because they know we've built a team of experts who not only bring expertise but share ways to become more sustainable on their own." This includes everything from pesticide- and chemical-free fertilizers to guidelines on water management, the latter of which is



Use of native plants on this hillside at Belvedere Place reduces maintenance costs, requires minimal water and incorporates all seven Bay Friendly principles. (Photo by Matt Powers)

currently Marizco's top priority. "It's been a blessing in disguise to have the drought conditions we've had the last couple years," he says, "because it's forced us to learn about water conservation. This is a huge priority—we need to protect and preserve our water for generations to

come."

A big part of MLM's water conservation program is incorporating "smart irrigation" systems. "Smart irrigation technology consists of controllers that gather information about site conditions—current weather data, horticultural science and a host of other variables—and integrate the information using web-based technology," Marizco explains. "This lets us manage our clients' irrigation systems remotely from our office." Then there's the "mulching mowers," which are used to finely cut blades of grass into small particles which are then returned back to the soil, replenishing water and nutrients. The result is a healthier lawn that requires less water and is largely fed by its own nutrients.

"We also recycle 100 percent of our green waste and turn it into mulch," Marizco says. "And we've taken that a step further—we encourage our clients to build compost bins and make their own mulch."



The Lodge at Sonoma features a meadow that requires minimal care and water, and also provides biodiversity for wildlife and beneficial organisms that help control plant pests.



Replacing high-maintenance turf areas with drought-tolerant flowering plants provides year-round color, conserves water and eliminates the need for powered machinery.

same time educating and encouraging water conservation and using Bay Friendly principles, we've made an important step toward creating a more sustainable future."

It adds biological diversity to their soil and puts nutrients back that might otherwise have been removed."

MLM has amassed numerous licenses and certifications since 2004, including Bay-Friendly (a comprehensive training program that offers a holistic approach to landscape management) and Qualified Water Efficient Landscaper (through the Sonoma County Water Agency and Marin Municipal Water District). It also has a commuter van and a small fleet of hybrid vehicles that transport managers and employees from county to county (MLM is headquartered in Santa Rosa but has an office in San Rafael). They landscape locally as much as possible, using plants from numerous North Bay nurseries for different projects.

"Our clients appreciate our professionalism," says Marizco, "and we're just excited we can make a difference in their landscape. If we can reduce their maintenance cost and increase beauty, while at the

<http://marizco.com>