



Greening Your World

By Pierre R. Marizco

When I was six, my father, an independent landscape gardener, enlisted my services pushing a lawnmower for his clients. I seemed to have a natural affinity for working the land and was completely fascinated by plants. I quickly adopted my father's core belief that, when you take care of the land, you take care of yourself, the people around you and the planet at large. To earn extra money while growing up, my friends all flipped burgers at fast food joints, but I'd always felt more comfortable playing in the dirt. I took on gardening jobs instead.

Encouraged and inspired by my mother to follow my dreams, I studied agriculture while holding just about every position possible within the industry. My ultimate goal was to start a landscaping company that supported the environment and its people, one that gave back to the community and symbolized the values and sense of family I'd learned from my parents.

Four years ago, I opened Marizco Landscape Management with one truck and one lawnmower. Today, we have more than 50 employees and care for many diverse clients throughout the greater North Bay.

A green culture

Landscaping is a big investment, not only financially, but personally. Having a beautiful, healthy environment around you is priceless. Now more than ever, it's critical to care for our land with the entire planet in mind. An efficient landscaping program should focus on strategic water and energy conservation, air quality protection, nurturing the soil, plant choice and using local, environmentally friendly products.

I realize the concept of "going green" may appear overwhelming and costly. But, in reality, we educate clients on easy-yet-effective ways to manage resources. To think globally and act locally, we constantly seek alternative ways of conducting business—right down to our hybrid vehicles and alternative-powered machinery (such as propane-powered mowers). Trained in water management and conservation, we use advanced, "smart" irrigation controllers like "ET Water." This cutting-edge system uses a Web-based interface with local weather stations to communicate onsite and adjust watering based on soil moisture, weather, climate, rainfall and other critical data.

"Natural pruning" encourages the innate shape of plants to come through as Mother Nature intended. This reduces the need for power shears, limiting emissions and noise pollution. Our mulching mowers "grasscycle" the turf at all our sites, meaning grass blades are finely cut into small particles and returned back to the soil, which replenishes water and nutrients. All of these efforts reduce maintenance and costs, waste and energy usage.

Government programs like "cash for grass" support swapping out grassy areas for plants and vegetation, and reduced turf means less water, equipment and maintenance. You can lower water use and costs by up to 65 percent by reducing grassy areas and exchanging certain plants.

Although it can be more expensive, Marizco has recently seen

clients opt for organic pest management programs or alternatives such as insecticidal soaps that are non-toxic and all-natural. The benefits far outweigh the cost when considering reduced pollutants to our waters, absence of harmful chemical residue in the soil and eliminating concern about children or pets walking and playing on the grounds. To support our regional ecosystem, we follow bay-friendly landscaping practices, a holistic approach to fostering soil health, conserving water and other valuable resources while reducing waste and preventing pollution.

A study in green

Once you realize the powerful results of green landscaping, it's easy to see why it's the wave of the future. Recently, a client in Rohnert Park asked us to create a landscape renovation plan that would save water and maintenance costs, look beautiful year round and make more efficient use of the land. We made improvements and changes any property can implement.

First, we eliminated two acres of turf grass. We replaced existing plants with low- to medium-water use options, added shrubs and flowering perennials for color throughout the year and converted the property's irrigation system from an overhead spray to a drip. Drip systems emit water at the root, so there's relatively no water waste. Overhead sprinklers spray onto walkways, buildings and structures. Eliminating them prevents weed growth, lowers labor costs and limits the amount of pesticides needed. This also reduces wood rot and asphalt deterioration, which means less replacement, repaving and resealing down the line.

The changes resulted in dramatic results. Water costs have decreased by 65 percent according to the city, and yearly landscape maintenance costs have been reduced by more than 33 percent.

The improvements also eliminated the need for gas-powered machinery, translating into a decrease in fuel reduction, lower emissions and less air and noise pollutants.

Moving forward

This case study exemplifies what's possible when we look at the big picture and carefully plan with conservation in mind. This is my vision for the future of my industry: sustainable landscaping that naturally replenishes itself, consumes less precious resources and uses plants and systems that work in harmony with the environment. Our combined efforts can provide the ripple effect of change needed to heal and safeguard our planet.

Santa Rosa resident Pierre R. Marizco is a leader in the landscaping community. He's started two successful landscape companies and is now president of Marizco Landscape Management. For more information call 707.546.9100 or visit www.marizco.com.

