

Small Yard, Big Appeal



By Arthur Navarrette
Executive Care Landscaping

Welcome to a new year! I want to take a moment to thank you for your positive feedback on the Christmas and New Year’s article. Your kind words mean so much, and I truly appreciate my readership. For those of you who regularly follow my articles, you know that my words are never meant to offend or diminish anyone else’s beliefs. I simply share from the perspective of someone who was searching, like many others, and found life-giving water. To not share that discovery would feel like a great injustice. Those who know me understand this perspective, and I appreciate you reading with an open heart.

That said, I want to personally thank those who reached out with messages of gratitude. Your encouragement means the world to me. If I could compare it to something, it would be like the journey of becoming a heart surgeon—years of study, long nights, successes and failures, hands-on experience under seasoned mentors, and then, finally, reaching the point where you can help others. When I hear from readers who are impacted by what I write, I feel that same sense of fulfillment—humbled, amazed, and deeply grateful.

But enough about me—let’s get to the article!

A Landscape Transformed

Michael and Kamy were fantastic clients, and it was a pleasure transforming both their front and back yards. Their front yard already had great “bones,” with three well-placed trees that suited the space. In fact, a neighbor even questioned why they were making any changes at all, commenting that they already had the nicest yard in the neighborhood!

Michael agreed that his yard was in good shape, but as someone who loves plants and has followed my articles, he knew there was untapped potential waiting to be unlocked. It’s like only ever knowing a Chevy—perfectly fine, practical, and reliable vehicle. But once you see an Audi, Infiniti, or Mercedes, you realize there’s more out there if you desire it. Landscaping is no different.

One of the biggest changes they wanted to make was removing their lawn. This is always a big step for homeowners, and one of the most common questions I get is, “What do we put in its place?” We’re so accustomed to having lawns that it can be hard to envision alternatives. My answer? Come and see! That’s why I often take clients to Green Acres or show them before-and-after pictures. Seeing real-life transformations makes all the difference.

Right now, I have two crews working on similar projects—one removing an existing lawn and for another we are designing a brand-new backyard without grass. With Michael and Kamy, we replaced their lawn with a combination of mounds, Sierra boulders and a dry stream bed. We are particular in doing dry stream beds. We strategically place boulders so they look natural, partially in the stream bed with depth to the stream bed to mimic a real one, rather than just placing the cobble on top of the ground like I often see.

Fine-Tuning the Vision

Michael was home on leave during the project, which made collaboration easy. The more we talked, the more confident I felt that we were aligned on the vision. However, when a client gets excited, and I see them embracing my ideas, I sometimes get carried away—momentarily forgetting about budgets! My main goal is always to create the best possible landscape, one that exceeds expectations.

To help manage costs, we postponed installing landscape lighting but planned ahead by pre-wiring the yard with 12-2 wire under the mulch. This way, when they’re ready to add lights, there’s no need to dig up the landscape—we can simply splice the fixtures into the existing wiring. This approach allows clients to phase their projects and manage their budgets more effectively.

Challenges and Solutions

One of the most challenging aspects of the project was designing a cost-effective, yet successful, landscape in the side yard and the backyard area near a large Redwood tree. Tree roots always present a challenge, and you cannot halfway plant a plant, it’s all or nothing. So, this is where I am challenged with going over the budget. I want to do it for the client, but you do not know what you are getting into, and once you are into it you are committed, you can’t leave a hole.

In the front side yard (a small space) they had two ornamental pear trees. You can imagine the roots in that small space. It made the space extremely root-bound—almost impossible for new plants to establish. The ideal solution would have been to construct a 12-inch block wall and fill it with 10 inches of fresh soil to create a planting bed where new plants could root without competing with the existing trees. However, to keep costs down, we took an alternative approach. We used Sierra boulders to create raised planting areas, adding soil around them. I selected hardier plants that, despite their delicate appearance, are tough enough to survive in challenging conditions.

In the backyard, the Redwood roots posed another challenge. Since the area was on a slope, we couldn’t add much soil. We had to dig through the root system to make space for new plants. It will take some time for them to establish, and hopefully they will do well.

Final Thoughts

Overall, Michael and Kamy’s yard was a rewarding project, and I can’t wait to see how it flourishes over time. If you’re considering a landscape transformation, I encourage you to explore beyond traditional lawns and if would like us to be your provider please start booking on our website earlier than later. However, please call me first so we can talk a bit.

Until next time, Happy Gardening! Take some time to plant bulbs—they’re easy to grow, beautiful early color and there’s still a good selection. If you enjoyed doing it and seeing them bloom start earlier next year, November or December.

Until next time, Arthur



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