

# OJAI VALLEY NEWS

The Ojai Valley's newspaper since 1891

ojaivalleynews.com

122nd Year, No. 66 • Friday, May 10, 2013 • Newsracks, 75¢, retail stores, 70¢ plus tax • Yearly subscription, \$52

## Water rates to increase with drought

*Ventura River County Water District seeks to limit costs through water conservation efforts, tips*

**Angelique LaCour**  
*OVN correspondent*

The Ventura River County Water District (VRCWD) discussed drought preparations for 2013 at its board of directors meeting Wednesday. VRCWD is trying to keep customer costs down by buying as little water as possible from Lake Casitas; but, because of below-average rainfall, it will have to do so to supplement the low water level in the area's groundwater aquifers.

"We will be spending about \$440,000 buying Lake Casitas water this year, and we have to pass that cost through to our customers," said Bert Rapp, VRCWD general manager. "For the typical

customer, this will add \$15 to \$25 to their monthly bills this summer."

"We really want to minimize what we take from Lake Casitas, not just because of cost, but because this is the first year of drought conditions and we don't know when that's going to improve," Rapp said. "We don't need to panic, but we have to conserve as best we can since Lake Casitas is our only backup water supply in the Ojai Valley."

There are many things customers can do to conserve daily water use: salvaged gray water from washing machines can easily be diverted to gardens; it's also legal to recycle gray water from showers and bathroom sinks (but not kitchens). Rapp also suggested installing water-

saving toilet fill valves to prevent the toilet tank from filling if there is a leak.

"I recently put these in my home, and I'm amazed at how often the tank is empty," Rapp said. "My toilets would have leaked for months before I would have noticed the water running. This is really a big water saver for a common problem."

With summer almost upon us, the biggest challenge facing inhabitants of this coastal desert region is how to conserve water while caring for lawns, plants, trees, flower and vegetable gardens.

"Irrigation is the elephant in the room,"

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## Drought:

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Rapp stressed. "One big change people can make is to replace bluegrass with Bermuda grass, or exchange your lawn for native drought resistant plants." According to Rapp, Bermuda grass can go without water an entire summer and still come back the next year.

Gardeners can visit the VRCWD office demonstration garden that is planted with native flowering plants that require as little as 0.4 gallons of water per week.

Mike Daley has been in the landscape design business for more than 30 years, and admits that even landscapes designed to be water conserving still require irrigation.

"Irrigation technology has come a long way, and we need to utilize it for water conservation," Daley said. "Smart irrigation controllers and on-site weather stations that can be programmed are now available to control cutting-edge computer-

designed precision nozzles on sprinklers."

The new multi-stream mini-rotors apply the water more slowly, and this slow absorption prevents runoff — so less water is wasted. Another advantage of these systems is that the sprinkling patterns provide much better watering coverage. Daley also recommends drip irrigation systems for water conservation.

"An irrigation system needs to be set up to water the most efficient area," Daley said. "Often, if your system is applying water to an area that needs it most, you are probably overwatering an area that needs less. So you are wasting that water."

Daley agrees with Rapp that lawns can be the biggest challenge when it comes to water conservation.

"Lawns on average can consume an inch and a half of water per week in the summer," Daley said. "Turf is best for high traffic areas because sod

### Gray water workshop

Casitas Municipal Water District will host a gray water workshop July 27 from 9 a.m. to noon.

Attendees will learn how install their own systems according to permit standards for Ventura County.

Register by calling 649-2251, Ext. 118.



Angelique LaCour

**Landscaper Mike Daley adjusts an irrigation nozzle.**

holds up better than any other ground cover, but if it's just for show, it's best to have a small lawn as part of a landscaping design."

If you are thinking of replacing your lawn with a swimming pool, Daley says it's a wash when it comes to water usage.

"A sod grower recently told me that a lawn in summer will consume the same amount of water per square foot as what evaporates in a comparable-sized swimming pool," Daley said.