

2024 WaterWise Garden Contest Winner



The WaterWise Garden Recognition Contest celebrates and recognizes beautiful, water efficient residential gardens throughout Santa Barbara County. The 2024 winner for the City of Santa Barbara is Barbara Bartolome.

Nestled in the Laguna neighborhood near Santa Barbara High School, Barbara has cultivated more than just a garden—she has created a haven of sustainability. The garden started many years ago, completed by Barbara and her husband, Victor. It was a project they did together after their kids moved away. “WaterWise is definitely our middle names!” exclaimed Barbara.

Barbara and Victor did all the work on their own, including the removal of the former lawn and the new planting. Barbara designed the parkway strip as a rock and shell river pattern, and they installed it together. Removing the grass that occupied the front yard and parkway was a tough and lengthy process, but with many benefits. As Barbara stated, “we’re happy to no longer have any grass areas in our garden and we even gave away our lawnmower!”

The garden, once a conventional mix of thirsty plants and lawn requiring regular watering, has undergone a transformation to plants that thrive on minimal water, yet still showcase their beauty and diversity. The new garden has no irrigation system, and the plants are watered occasionally by hand. This water-thrifty garden also highlights that edible plants can thrive with responsible water use. The garden contains an orange tree that Barbara won as part of a Roosevelt Elementary School fundraiser. The existing banana trees provide shade for the home and garden.



Walking through the garden is a sensory experience—a symphony of colors and textures amidst the terraced front yard. Colorful succulents nestle alongside hardy perennials and a winding pathway. The well-mulched garden beds retain soil moisture, reduce evaporation, and keep out pesky weeds. The Bartolome’s water-wise garden reminds us that each of us has the power to cultivate change—one plant, one garden at a time.

In Santa Barbara, an average of fifty percent of the water used at homes goes toward landscape irrigation. Water wise gardens not only save money on water bills, but are also colorful and lush, support wildlife, and are easily maintained. For garden inspiration and to see the 2024 garden contest entries from all over Santa Barbara County, visit WaterWiseSB.org/GardenContest.

