

Your Better Yard



TODAY'S SPEAKERS

- **Mary Ann Dickinson** – President and CEO, Alliance for Water Efficiency
- **Drew Atwater** – Director of Finance and Water Resources, Moulton Niguel Water District
- **John Lansden** – Moulton Niguel Water District
- **Kevin Buck** – CEO, RainMaster Lawn Systems
- **Chris Klein** – Founder and CEO, Rachio
- **Sarah Heitzman** – Rachio
- **Julius Duncan** – Environmental Engineer, EPA WaterSense

ORIGINAL DATE:

JUNE 30, 2020

[WaterSense Webinars](#)

[Webinar Recording on YouTube](#)

WEBINAR SUMMARY

In the introduction, Ms. Dickinson provided an update on the Alliance for Water Efficiency's (AWE's) Learning Landscapes Grant Program (<https://www.allianceforwaterefficiency.org/news/learning-landscapes-grant-program-and-lessons>). The grant will be used to build new or improve existing outdoor educational spaces that serve grades 3 through 8. They will focus on projects that include elements of efficient water management and incorporate at least one of AWE's new Learning Landscapes Lessons in their education program. Although the grant applications deadline has passed, the Learning Landscapes Lessons will remain available for free download on the AWE website.

Mr. Duncan went over tips and resources that WaterSense provides on designing a water efficient landscape. Keeping a healthy soil, mulching landscape beds, and using drought-tolerant and native/regionally appropriate plants help to hold water in the soil and reduce your need for irrigation. Including green infrastructure features like rain gardens promotes infiltration and reduces excessive runoff.

FEATURED SPEAKER: DREW ATWATER

Mr. Atwater began with an introduction and provided the history of the Moulton Niguel Water District's (MNWD) efficiency program. The program has been highly successful at turf replacement programs across the region. They also conducted a study at the University of California, Riverside that evaluated residential rebate program performance and recommended marketing strategies and direct installations.

FEATURED SPEAKER: JOHN LANSDEN

In 2016 MNWD did a smart timer direct install program. The program was beneficial to the customer and had the best response in rebate savings. Professional installation of the smart controller had the greatest water savings compared to when the customer installed the controller themselves. Also, the professional installation was easier for the customer since the professional could accurately program the controller based on the site's needs.

WaterSense Materials

<https://www.epa.gov/watersense>

- [Find it, Flag it, Fix it: A Checklist for Your Landscape](#)
- [Relieve Pressure and Reduce Water Waste from Spray Sprinklers](#)
- [Smart Watering with Weather-Based Irrigation Controllers](#)
- [Case Study: Oklahoma Makes Median Irrigation OK](#)

MNWD teamed up with local businesses for their Naturescapes program. The Naturescapes program was made to be as easy as possible by allowing the customer to first attend a landscape workshop that teaches the importance of creating a water efficient landscape. Then they can sign up to work with a landscape professional for a final design of the landscape and installation. The landscape professionals do a pre-inspection of grass and other areas of the landscape that can be replaced.

FEATURED SPEAKER: KEVIN BUCK

Mr. Buck is the CEO of RainMaster Lawn Systems and serves the Eau Claire, WI and Minneapolis, MN areas. To ensure that their customer's soil is healthy, all their lawn healthcare programs come with a free pH test. They also educate their customers on proper landscaping and irrigation techniques. When they talk to their customers, they remind them of how to irrigate efficiently to save water and have incorporated using a Rachio controller to make things easier. By doing that they have seen huge savings from customers.

FEATURED SPEAKER: CHRIS KLEIN AND SARAH HEITZMAN

Mr. Klein talked about Rachio Thrive, a soil amendment that is used along with the Rachio controller. A large majority of customers fertilize throughout the year and Rachio Thrive intends to fertilize efficiently to keep the soil healthier and reduce overall fertilizer use. It is a micro algae product that increases drought tolerance and decreases watering needs. Since it is a micro alga, it avoids applying unnecessary NPK (Nitrogen, Phosphorous, and Potassium commonly in fertilizer) into the soil that would normally run to storm drains. Rachio has worked with a variety of utilities to help address water conservation. Through the study that have done research on how the Rachio Thrive has helped improve water quality by reducing the amount of fertilizer customers have to use. The improved soil quality has also reduced how much irrigation is used, saving water.

SPEAKER QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: Does the MNWD utility provide a contractor for the Naturescapes program?

A: Mr. Atwater answered that MNWD uses contractors from a local nursery, Tree of Life, to do the landscaping for the Naturescapes program.

Q: Does Rachio Thrive replace routine fertilization and weed control treatments? Or is it more like if the soil microbiome is improved those treatments would not be needed?

A: Mr. Klein responded that they are starting to take plant tissue tests before, during, and after treatments to look at the microbiome. They are looking to determine how much NPK is found in the soil and they will reduce how much NPK is used because of their application of Thrive.

Q: How can the Rachio be set for plants in Southern California that are expecting water in winter and just a little in summer?

A: Mr. Klein answered that the schedule does adjust based on evapotranspiration (ET). It does not use a dynamic crop coefficient, so the landscape settings are not currently specific to SoCal plants. The team is researching specific settings for California native plants to be part of a future update.

Q: For Naturescapes, is the soil amended to better support native plants?

A: Mr. Atwater responded that the program is designed to support local soil for native plants. That removes the necessity to add additional amendments to the soil.