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**WaterSmart Landscape Contest Winners Create a Low-Maintenance Garden
for Retirement**

Spring Valley, CA – Catherine and David Spence, a couple from Chula Vista have been awarded the “Best in District” title in the Otay Water District’s annual WaterSmart Landscape Contest for upgrading their grassy side yard. They opted for a low-maintenance, drought-tolerant garden that suits their busy and active lifestyle after retirement, resulting in an overall reduction in water use of approximately 39%.

The Spences purchased their home in 1998, located in the developing community of Sunbow. After years of living elsewhere and working for the U.S. Department of Defense, they settled back into their home in 2018 to create a comfortable space for their retirement, prioritizing a yard that required less water and less upkeep.

To design their ideal yard, they found inspiration from model homes that demonstrated the beauty and simplicity of drought-tolerant landscaping. In 2020, they enrolled in the WaterSmart Landscape Makeover classes provided by the San Diego County Water Authority and its member agencies.

In 2023, the Spences received a \$2,376 rebate from the SoCal WaterSmart Turf Replacement Program for replacing 792 square feet of turf in their side yard and adding water-efficient features.

The project included installing a wide variety of low-water-use plants, a Hunter Wi-Fi irrigation controller, replacing traditional sprinklers with a drip system, and applying gorilla hair shredded redwood mulch. They also installed two rain barrels to collect water for potted plants, a decorative fountain, and birdbaths, which attract a variety of local wildlife.

One rain barrel captures water for the side yard, while the second barrel is located down in their sloped backyard and connected to the home’s rain gutter by an extended downspout.

The Spences’ landscape is in the District’s division 2, represented by board member Delfina Gonzalez.

“Their garden enhances the beauty of our community with native, water-wise plants while also supporting local wildlife and helping our ecosystem thrive, all with minimal water use,” said Gonzalez. “We look forward to seeing their garden continue to flourish and inspire future conservation initiatives.”

The District recognized the winners at its September board meeting, presenting them with a gift certificate to a local nursery, among other prizes.

For more information about the contest winner, visit otaywater.gov/landscape-contest-winner-2025.

The Otay Water District is a public agency providing water, recycled water, and sewer service to approximately 242,155 customers within approximately 125 square miles of southeastern San Diego County, including the communities of eastern Chula Vista, Bonita, Jamul, Spring Valley, Rancho San Diego, unincorporated areas of El Cajon and La Mesa, and east Otay Mesa along the international border with Mexico. For more information about the Otay Water District, visit otaywater.gov.

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