

How 4 Iconic Places in Los Angeles Are Saving Water

Dodger Stadium, Forest Lawn, the Getty, and Exposition Park seek innovative ways to conserve during the drought.

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California's drought has persisted for four years, prompting the governor to order water suppliers to cut consumption by 25 percent. So how are Los Angeles landmarks responding to the water crisis?

We contacted four iconic spots—Dodger Stadium, Forest Lawn—Hollywood Hills, the Getty Center, and Exposition Park—to ask what they are doing to conserve water. Three of the four declined to release data (which is not public record) on how much they use. But they all described the steps they are taking, from an experimental machine that sucks water out of humid air to draining of popular fountains

Before the drought, Dodger Stadium workers never had to soak trees and plants surrounding the 56,000-capacity ballpark and its sprawling parking lots. "These areas haven't had any supplemental irrigation since somewhere in the '80s," says Dodgers landscape manager Chaz Perea. "Now a tremendous amount of mature trees are dying back. We've lost many of them."

To save the acacia, eucalyptus, sumac, and walnut trees, the ballpark is trying an experimental device, created by a company called Skywell, that pulls moisture out of the air and cools it to produce water droplets. During humid periods, the machine works by the process of condensation, cooling atmospheric water below its dew point. It generates 100 gallons of water in a few days. While that's hardly a tidal wave, it's enough to keep many trees on life support during the drought without bringing up the stadium's overall usage of imported water. "The less humid it is, the less good the cost-benefit is, though," says Perea. "We feel it's important to experiment with new technology."

On the field, the Dodgers have installed a water-saving irrigation system that measures underground moisture levels. They also have installed low-flush and waterless toilets throughout the 53-year-old stadium, which is the largest and third oldest in Major League Baseball, and replaced some ground covers with mulch.

Forest Lawn

Forest Lawn without the lawn? Suffice it to say the famed cemetery in the Hollywood Hills—where Bette Davis, Gene Autry, Lucille Ball, Buster Keaton, Liberace, Brittany Murphy, and other stars are buried—is not dispensing with turf anytime soon.

Since it opened in 1952, lush landscapes have been a principal selling point of the burial grounds. For the past few years, though, Forest Lawn-Hollywood Hills has been irrigated with 100 percent recycled water.

The 444-acre cemetery also precisely adjusts its sprinkler use, thanks to its participation in a state system that automatically tracks weather patterns to determine just how much water is needed to sustain vegetation. And Forest Lawn is increasingly installing drought-tolerant plants in ornamental beds.

But might the cemetery forgo some grass in the future if the drought considerably worsens? Just such a step has been taken at cemeteries in other areas of the arid Southwest. A Forest Lawn spokesperson didn't respond to a request for comment.

Getty Center

The 1.3 million annual visitors to the Getty Center, iconic for its art, architecture, and gardens, encounter signs saying the museum is cutting back on water use. Last year, the massive museum, which sits on a prominent 110-acre hilltop site in the Santa Monica Mountains, drained pools and fountains except for those inhabited by fish and plants. Similar steps were taken at the Getty Villa museum in Malibu.

"This saves nearly 2,500 gallons of water a day, and it helps send a message in support of water conservation. Some visitors have been disappointed by the change, but we also know that many visitors appreciate our effort to do our part," says Getty director of facilities Michael Rogers.

Museum-goers also may notice some conspicuously barren landscapes near the entrance, which recently was rebuilt after the widening of the I-405 freeway. The lack of plants is intentional. "We are curtailing reinstalling most of the landscape until drought conditions pass," Rogers says.

The Getty also has increased use of drought-tolerant plants, a leak detection system, drip irrigation, and more efficient ways of delivering humidity to exhibition rooms to preserve its masterworks, including those by Paul Gauguin and Vincent van Gogh.

As a result, the Getty Center's water use has declined 55 percent since 1997, when it opened, Rogers says.

Exposition Park

Drawing more than six million visitors a year, Exposition Park is jammed with attractions: the expansive Rose Garden with more than 15,000 bushes, the Coliseum, the 102-year-old Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, and the California Science Center, which is home to the space shuttle Endeavor.

One thing it has increasingly less of on its 160 acres is grass. In efforts to conserve water, park management has eliminated some green areas and is looking for more places to remove thirsty lawns.

"One idea still in discussion is to replace some turf areas with decomposed granite or mulch to create picnic pads, educational kiosks, and graphic trailheads," says Ana Lasso, general manager of the park, which was an agricultural fairground from 1872 to 1910.

Watering times have been reduced, as the park uses special irrigation technology and software called Calsense, and drought-tolerant vegetation has been planted.

Home to two Olympiads, two Super Bowls, and a World Series, the state-run park is the only one of the four icons to reveal its water usage: 47.2 million gallons in 2013, down 10 percent to 42.4 million in 2014. Many water-saving technologies are expensive, so the park has to choose them wisely, Lasso says.