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Pamela Berstler (L) and Marianne Simon (R) of Green Garden Group describe the native plants at a water-conserving residential garden they helped create amidst California's historic drought. — AFP photos



Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) Water Conservation Specialist Damon Ayala finds water leaking onto the pavement.



A sign encourages homeowners to replace their lawns with water conserving and money saving regenerative front yard gardens.

# 'Water police' patrol drought-hit LA streets

Damon Ayala patrols the streets of drought-stricken Los Angeles every day, inspecting the sidewalks. Each time he sees a puddle, he stops. He is part of the city's Department of Water and Power team, which looks into hundreds of community complaints filed by neighbors each week about water waste.

"It's not extreme, but it's something that we want them to take a look at," he says of one pool of water. "Looks like they have drip irrigation on this side. So there might be just a broken connector."

Ayala's patrol comes as California and the western United States are in the grip of a severe, years-long drought. Scientists say global warming driven by human activity, including the unchecked burning of fossil fuels, is creating a greater number of extreme events.

With reservoirs and rivers at historic lows, Los Angeles authorities have brought in water restrictions, such as limiting lawn irrigation to as little as eight min-

utes, twice per week. Ayala notes down the addresses of properties where he finds evidence of infringement. The first violation prompts a warning.

"A lot of times they don't know about the ordinance, and that's our job to educate them," he said. Repeat offenders are fined between \$200 and \$600. "We're not looking really for their money that doesn't get us more water. We're trying to get behavioral change," he said.

"So that way we can capture the water savings from making those changes." After a fifth infraction, a device is installed which physically restricts a household's supply, although Ayala says that step has rarely been necessary. "We've been in serious drought situations in the past in the city of Los Angeles, and its citizens responded," he said. "And we expect them to respond this time around too."

**'Obvious choice'**

The water department says it is begin-

ning to see results. Officials noted a reduction in residential water demand in June, compared to the same month last year. But as the drought worsens, more permanent changes to the city's landscape could become necessary.

Famous for its rows of palm trees, Los Angeles has also traditionally been known for its lush, green lawns, maintained with automatic sprinklers. Residents are increasingly replacing their thirsty lawns with plants native to this desert region.

"When we think of how much water gets used in a residential setting, over 50 per cent is actually used outdoors," said Pamela Berstler, executive director of urban landscaping firm G3 Garden Group. She and her colleague Marianne Simon teach classes as part of a city program to encourage Angelenos to trade in their lawns for alternatives.

South Los Angeles residents Gabriel Golden and Danielle Koplinskase, joined the program a few years ago. "The envi-

ronmental impact of watering a lawn, not only in the midst of a drought but also living in a very dry climate, made this an obvious choice," they said.

"We also sought to inspire our neighbors and community by going to a drought tolerant and native garden." Native plants such as California oak, and flowers that only require a few drops of water each week to thrive, now adorn the couple's garden.

"There are parts of southern California where they have cut the water down to one day of watering per week," said Simon. "And the reality is that these kinds of gardens would be fine on that amount of water-in fact, could do with less-but our traditional lawns can't survive on that."

**'Short-sighted'**

Other popular alternatives include artificial lawns or gravel, although Simon stresses the environmental benefits of maintaining some form of vegetation.

"The problem is that we are so short-sighted and so narrow in our vision that all we can see is saving the water," she said.

A planted area can be cooler by "easily 20 degrees" Fahrenheit (10 degrees Celsius) than a gravel replacement, and "there's the ability to hold on to rain when we do get it so that we can replenish aquifers."

As she speaks, a nearby sprinkler turns on under the blazing California sun, spraying a lawn during prohibited hours. With the thermometer hovering around 97 degrees F, water falling on the wilted, uneven grass and trickling down the sidewalk evaporates within minutes.

"It's heartbreaking to see, but it's also a lesson," she said, pointing to the withered garden. "That should be our past and this should be our future," Simon added, looking back at the native plants. — AFP



Amanda Eames (R) from Melbourne, Australia, works to collect dried Irish turf with the Power family, cut from the Bog of Allen before being used as a traditional way of heating Irish homes, in Carragh, west of Dublin. — AFP photos

## Turf wars stall Ireland's green agenda

In the aftermath of the hottest day in Ireland for more than 130 years this week, small family groups picked their way across the Bog of Allen in the country's midlands collecting sun-dried turf. The briquettes of peat, which are liquorice black when hewn wet from the ground, had turned a toasted brown in the soaring July temperatures and were ready to be stored and burnt as winter fuel.

But the bog, like others across Ireland, has become a frontline in a struggle to cut carbon emissions and conserve peat lands, pitting rural communities against urban policy makers. "There's very deep anger and resentment that the likes of the Green Party and urban members of the Green Party think... they can run riot over the country people of Ireland," John Dore a spokesman for the Kildare Turf Cutters Association told AFP.

Fourteen percent of the Irish population use turf, a smoky fuel, to heat their homes, according to Ireland's

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). For those who rely on the traditional energy source, which has been cut and burnt in the country for centuries, turf is a birthright.

"It's a very cultural and community activity," Dore explained. "We're fuel independent. It's about being independent as well." During a visit to Japan on Tuesday, Ireland's prime minister Micheal Martin said his government needed to focus on emissions as it looks to set legally binding targets by the end of the month.

"I think what the heatwaves are showing, it's bringing it home to people the enormity of the consequences of climate change," he told reporters in Tokyo. "It's here now."

**'Back to the bog'**

EPA figures released on Thursday showed a 4.7 percent rise in greenhouse gas emissions in 2021 compared to 2020 — and up 1.1 percent on 2019 pre-pandemic levels. Martin's three-party governing coalition, which includes Ireland's Greens, has been licking its wounds after it tried to place curbs on the sale of turf earlier this year.

A series of heated debates on the restrictions triggered a rebellion among the government's rural deputies. One independent lawmaker from Tipperary, Mattie McGrath, said ministers needed a "trip back to the bog" to realise the impact of proposed restrictions on low-income

families living in rural areas.

As he unveiled revised plans to curb the retail sale of turf last week, Green Party Environment Minister Eamon Ryan said controversial measures restricting the sale of turf to within communities of less than 500 people had been dropped.

John Dore, spokesman for the Kildare Turf Cutters Association, poses for a photograph with his stock of turf that he uses to heat his home.

Under the new rules, sales of turf to family, friends and neighbours will continue as before. But sales at retail outlets and online will be banned, along with the advertisement of turf sales in traditional media. For Patsy Power, a turf cutter whose family has rights to cut and remove turf on the Bog of Allen, the changes will make virtually no difference to the way he operates. "We've been taking turf from here all my life time," said Power, 60, who has seven siblings who gather turf from the same plot.



"We wouldn't be selling it anyway, it's merely for domestic use and it'll merely be family," he added as he took a break from throwing clods into the back of his truck.

**'Not worth the heat'**

Dore called the government's retreat a "bit of a victory". But he said the compromise had also been driven by factors such as rising energy prices and fuel insecurity from the war in Ukraine rather than concern for rural communities.

The spokesman, who also cuts and stores turf at his home nearby, said he understood Ireland had international climate commitments but characterised targeting turf farmers with curbs as "starting with the small guys".

Conservationists have urged the government to grasp the nettle of turf cutting over the damage it does to bogs, which are natural carbon sinks and absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. "There's no onus on turf cutters to restore the habitat or manage emissions from when they're draining the bog," said Tristram Whyte, policy officer for the Irish Peatland Conservation Council.

"Along with that all the peat silt enters the waterways and with the emissions there's biodiversity loss. "It's the most emitting source of fuel that you can use... the effects from burning peat is not worth the heat." — AFP

## France plans fashion revolution with climate-impact labels

Is it better for the environment if you buy a brand-new cotton T-shirt or a recycled one?

Well, it depends.

Recycling has obvious benefits, but the process shortens cotton fibres and so usually has to be mixed with some oil-based material to keep it from falling apart. Such trade-offs make it tricky to figure out the real sustainability rating of clothes-but brands in Europe will soon have no choice.

By next year, every item of clothing sold in France will require a label detailing its precise climate impact-with a similar rule expected for the rest of the European Union by 2026. That means juggling many different and conflicting data points: Where and how were its raw materials grown? What was used to colour it? How far did it travel? Was the factory powered with solar energy or coal?

The French Agency for Ecological Transition (Ademe) is currently testing 11 proposals for how to collect and compare data-and what the resulting label might look like to consumers-using 500 real-life items of clothing. "The message of the law is clear-it will become obligatory, so brands need to prepare, to make their products traceable, to organise the automatic collection of data," Erwan Autret, one of the coordinators at Ademe, told AFP. "Some say the models are too simple, some say they're too complicated, but it's a sign of the maturity of the debate that no one questions the need for these calculations anymore."

**'Transparent and informed'**

The need for change in fashion is urgent. Statistics are notoriously hard to verify, but the UN says the industry is responsible for 10 percent of global carbon emissions, as well as a significant portion of water consumption and waste.

Labels can be a key part of the solution, say campaigners. "It will force brands to be more transparent and informed... to collect data and create long-term relationships with their suppliers-all things they're not used to doing," said Victoire Satto, of The Good Goods, a media agency focused on sustainable fashion. "Right now it seems infinitely complex," she added. "But we've seen it applied in other industries such as medical supplies." Seeing how the winds are blowing, the textile industry has been racing to come up with technical solutions.

A recent presentation by Premiere Vision, a Paris-based textiles conference, highlighted many new processes including non-toxic leather tanning, dyes drawn from fruits and waste-and even biodegradable underwear that can be thrown on the compost. But the key to sustainability is using the right fabric for the right garment, said Ariane Bigot, Premiere Vision's deputy head of fashion. That means synthetic and oil-based fabrics will still have a place, she said: "A strong synthetic with a very long lifespan might be right for some uses, such as an over-garment that needs little washing." — AFP



People work to collect dried Irish turf.