

Water Efficient Landscape

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We have been blessed with several good rainfall years in a row but we know that our cycle of droughts will return. If you want to be prepared to deal with the drought the best time to convert your landscape is when there is moisture in the soil and generous rainfall. Even well-adapted drought tolerant plants need a period to develop a root system and become established.

One of the good things about our options for low water use landscapes here in the San Antonio area is that we have a large palette of plants from which to choose. We can have 12 months of color, attract birds and butterflies, have large activity areas and/or even a large lawn area if we plan well and take advantage of the options that exist.

To increase the water holding capacity of the soil incorporate 2 to 4 inches of compost into the planting area. Another 2 to 4 inches of mulch over the root systems of trees, shrubs, perennials, and annual plants will reduce evaporation, keep the soil cool, and reduce weeds.

The key to making a lawn a part of the low water use landscape is to select the right turf varieties and to be accept a mowed yellow lawn in the summer if the rains don't come. Both Bermuda and zoysia grasses have the capability to go dormant in droughts. As soon as the rains return, they green up. Use Bermuda grass in full sun. Zoysia grass can tolerate some shade.

Maximize the amount of land area that is covered with flagstone, decorative flat blocks, or mulch. They can be play or patio areas. Use, rock, brick without mortar, and mulch or decomposed granite for paths.

Groundcovers like Asiatic jasmine, dwarf ruellia, monkey grass and liriopie are attractive and drought tolerant plus they tolerate shadier areas than lawn grass. Perennials are permanent and can bloom every year. Blue plumbago, lavender lantana, the blue salvias, iris, daylilies, shrimp plant, and Turks cap are a few of the choices. Some are deer proof, some prosper in the shade, and most provide nectar for butterflies and hummingbirds. Visit plantanswers.com for a more extensive list and more details on the plant characteristics.

Shade trees, small trees, shrubs and vines are also part of a low water use landscape. Native plants are important but even the tough modern and old-fashioned roses qualify as xeriscape plants. There are long lists from which to choose on plantanswers.com and the SAWS landscape website (gardenstylea@saws.org)

While you are on the SAWS website consider their most recent "Coupon". For qualifying SAWS customers. The "Coupon " will provide reimbursement for part of the costs involved in replacing 200 sq. ft. of lawn with hardscape and low-water use plants. If you have never used a SAWS coupon before you may be eligible for reimbursement of specific costs on up to 1600sq.ft. of changes.

For help planning your landscape changes one of my favorite resources is Greg Grant's and Roger Holmes' "Home Landscaping Texas". They divide the task of the whole landscape into chewable portions.

Even better yet, consider attending the Landscape School on Saturday June 10 at Aldacos at Dominion Ridge on the I-10 access road sponsored by the Gardening Volunteers of South Texas and the Trinity-

Glen Rose Groundwater Conservation District. The cost is \$30 per individual or \$50 for 2 attendees from the same household. The Program runs from 8:30 am until 1 pm. For more information and to enroll go to www.gardeningvolunteers.org/design-school

The Landscape School provides lectures that will address; plant selection, how to work with your specific property, improving your soil, and why it is important to create a plan before planting. One of the best parts of the class is that it offers one-on-one counseling on the ideas and plan that you have for your landscape. You will also receive 3 full color publications on plant options and landscape planning.