



Xeriscaping Your Landscape: How to be Your Best Water Miser



It's not just for Desert Dwellers

You don't have to live in Tucson to xeriscape. It's not just for those with Saguaro cacti in their backyards. It's also for Marylanders who get an average of 41 inches of rain per year. Xeriscaping is all about efficiency, with a bit of common sense thrown in. The main idea is to reduce the amount of water use by choosing plants with low water requirements. While the purpose of xeriscaping is universal, specific plants vary depending on geography. There are three key components to successful xeriscaping: plant selection, soil composition, and water use. Consider your yards' microclimate. What is the layout of your land? Do you have low wet spots, elevated dry spots? When is the typical wet/dry season, and how long does it last? Based on the answers to these questions, select plants best suited to the natural weather patterns and topography of your locale. This is where common sense comes in to tell you not to plant a Lizard's Tail in a meadow (it will die from lack of water) or a Prickly Pear in a marsh (it will die from an abundance of water).

Leaves, Flowers, and Water

Leaves and flowers consume much less water than the ubiquitous turfgrass covering most of our lawns. Compared to other plants (e.g., flowers and shrubs), turfgrass is a gluttonous consumer of water. It could drink the native coneflower under the table in no time flat. A good way to start conserving water is to eliminate or reduce the amount of turfgrass in your yard and make room for more water efficient plants. Some good options are Blackeyed Susans, Asters, Wood Lilies, Goldenrods, Witchhazel, and Butterfly Bush, to name a few. Look for native plant species, which are best adapted to the climate in this region. A native plant will demand less water than an exotic or foreign variety.



Get Your Hands Dirty

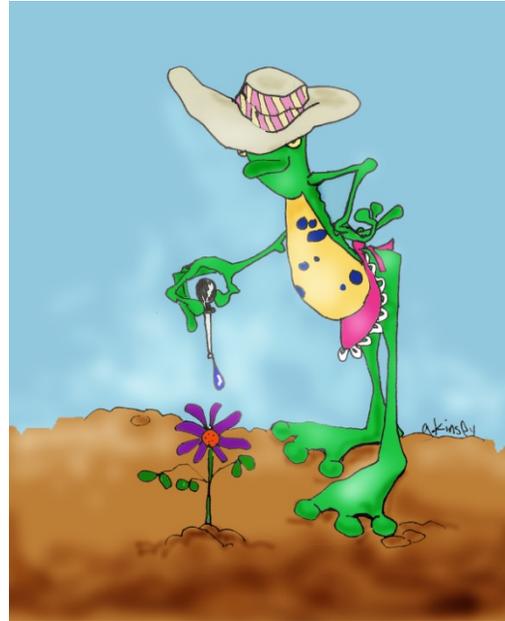
Do you know what is in your soil? If you don't know the organic/clay/ nutrient content or aeration of your soil, your well-intentioned garden may pay the price by withering quickly. In this area of Maryland, good soil has adequate aeration, a sufficient amount of organic material, and nutrients to allow plants to thrive. A soil test will zero in on what you may or may not need in terms of soil amendments. Your



local plant nursery is a great place to find a soil test kit.

Dole it Out, Accordingly

While it is establishing itself, your xeriscape will need to be watered. You can do this any way you wish: soaker hose, timed sprinkler, hand watering can, eye dropper. This is where your inner miser comes out, reminding you to water efficiently. In the warmer months, water your garden in the morning before it gets too hot. Watering during the high heat of midday is wasteful. Much of the water your plants need will be lost via evapotranspiration before it can reach the roots. Speaking of roots, water them deeply. Long, infrequent watering allows the roots to penetrate deep into the soil. Deeper roots extend down to the cooler layer of the soil and are able to withstand drought better than shallow roots. Frequent watering conditions roots to grow shallow, which makes them susceptible to the hot upper soil drought conditions. The ultimate goal of xeriscaping is to have well-established plants with minimal water needs.



In the end, go easy on the grass, heavy on the flowers, and you needn't pray for rain.

For additional information, please visit the following sites:

<http://wateruseitwisely.com>

<http://mastergardener.umd.edu/files/NativePlantsofMDFeb%2005.pdf>

<http://www.nps.gov/plants/pubs/chesapeake/>

<http://www.hgic.umd.edu/>

http://www.hgic.umd.edu/media/documents/hg110a_001.pdf