

Seven Steps To A “WaterSmart” Landscape

Having a WaterSmart landscape is more than just watering correctly, it is the combination of several gardening principles that *together* create a beautiful landscape that maximizes water efficiency. Essentially a WaterSmart landscape is xeriscaping in its true form! Here are the steps that *together* create a WaterSmart landscape:

1.) Planning and Design

Planning is essential in creating a sustainable, attractive landscape. Consider site characteristics that affect water use (i.e. slopes, exposures, micro-climates) and then design the area with these things in mind.

2.) Soil Preparation

A healthy soil will result in healthier root systems, which, in turn, create a more drought tolerant landscape. Amending entire garden beds with organic matter such as compost can help loosen heavy, clay soils allowing moisture and nutrients to infiltrate more readily to the roots vs. running off.

3.) Efficient Irrigation

Water deeply and infrequently to encourage deep, more drought tolerant roots. Irrigate early in the morning to lessen evaporative losses. Only water when absolutely necessary - check the soil to be sure! Water plants to appropriate depths. Measure watering depth with a probe (i.e. long screwdriver, piece of rebar, strong wire, etc.) - when you hit resistance, you have likely hit dry soil, and this is the depth to which the moisture has reached.

4.) Mulch

The need for supplemental irrigation is reduced when organic mulches are properly applied around plants. Examples of organic mulches include wood chips, cedar mulch, straw, leaves, cottonseed hulls, etc. Organic mulches limit evaporation from the soil, moderate soil temperatures, discourage weed growth, and break down over time helping to improve the condition of the soil.

5.) Right Plant, Right Place

Choose plants that are adapted and suitable for your location and climate. Plants vary in the amount of moisture they require so it is critical to know what those requirements are. Group or zone plants with similar water requirements together. Select low water use, drought tolerant, or native plants if possible.

6.) Practical Turf Areas

Limit cool-season turf areas (i.e. Tall Fescue, Kentucky Bluegrass). Consider using mulches, groundcovers, ornamental or native grasses, shrub beds, decks or patios instead. Avoid odd shaped or narrow strips of turfgrass as these can be difficult to irrigate and may result in wasted water. Consider warm-season turfgrass such as Buffalo and Bermudagrass as an alternative to cool-season turf.

7.) Proper Maintenance

While WaterSmart landscapes can be low maintenance, they will still require some degree of care throughout the year. At appropriate times, proper pruning, mowing, weeding, fertilizing, watering, and insect/disease control are important to maintain the health of your landscape.

