

Xeriscape

7 Steps to a More Attractive Landscape

Turf, trees, bushes and flowers with great appeal!

1. Planning & Design

Establish 3 water-use requirement zones. Group plants and turf with similar water needs in the same zone:

Low: Requires little or no supplemental water after establishment.

Moderate: Requires some supplemental water during dry periods.

High: Limited areas where full water requirements are easily met. The "high" zone should be the most visible area of the landscape, such as an entranceway or patio area.

Helpful Tips:

- Plan for shade - a shaded landscape can be as much as 20° cooler than a landscape in full sun and preserves moisture.
- Arbors, trellis, and fences with vine covers can be effective sources of shade and help retain moisture.
- Azaleas, dogwoods, rebuds, and Japanese maples are good choices for moderate water-use zones.

2. Soil Analysis

Test Your Soil

Take a sample to your local county extension office. The analysis will help you understand what is needed to encourage a strong, healthy root system. Strong roots help plants absorb moisture and survive drought.

Improve the Structure of Poor Soil

To check the structure of soil, dig a 12" to 15" hole. Fill the hole with water to see how fast it drains. If the water remains in the hole more than 12 hours, the soil is poorly drained. Improvements will vary based on soil structure.

Helpful Tips:

- When planting trees and shrubs, dig holes at least 2 times wider than the root ball to encourage roots to grow outward.
- Don't add organic matter to the planting hole for trees and shrubs. Organic matter encourages roots to stay in the hole instead of growing out.
- For soils that dry out rapidly, use organic matter in the soil throughout the planting bed.

3. Appropriate Plant Selection

Choose plants that will thrive in your local environment:

Plants prone to drought stress, such as azaleas and dogwoods, prefer moist, well-drained soil, while more drought-resistant plants, such as crape myrtle and juniper, grow well on very dry sites.

Place plants with high water requirements in areas that stay moist naturally, and low-water plants in drier areas.

Helpful Tip: Native plants are not necessarily the most drought tolerant.

4. Practical Turf Areas

Practical turf areas include:

- small areas near the home entrance
- recreational areas
- a blanket of turf on a highly erodible slope

Irrigate turf only in high-impact, visible areas of the landscape. During drought periods, healthy turf-grass will wilt, turn brown, then regain its normal color and growth when it receives adequate water.

Design turf areas in practical shapes that can be mowed and irrigated easily. Avoid sharp angles and long, narrow strips.

5. Efficient Irrigation

Minimize the need for water from irrigation. Zone irrigation systems to water plants with different needs separately. For example, water turf separately from shrubs and flowers.

Select the appropriate type of irrigation. Trees and shrubs in the low water-use zone need supplemental watering only during establishment (8-10 weeks after planting). Plants in moderate water-use zones require water only during periods of limited rainfall, when they show signs of stress. A soaker hose or hand watering is usually all you will need.

Use more efficient irrigation methods. Drip irrigation systems and automatic controllers that detect rainfall and turn off the irrigation system, are good examples. Hand watering is effective for watering selected plants that show signs of drought-stress.

6. Use of Mulches

Mulches conserve moisture by preventing evaporation and maintaining even moisture. The best mulches to retain moisture are pine straw, pine-bark mini-nuggets and shredded hardwood mulch, or chips. Fine-texture mulches hold moisture better than coarse-textured mulches, such as large-nugget pine bark. Rock, gravel and marble are not as effective, since they absorb and re-radiate heat, increasing water-loss.

Helpful Tips:

- Apply about 3" of mulch under ornamental plants. Use hands to pull mulch back 2-3 inches from the base of the tree or shrub to prevent wood rotting disease.
- Extend the mulched area 2-3 times the canopy spread to help protect outgrowing root systems.
- Place newspaper (2 sheets thick) under organic mulch to help conserve water. Wet the newspapers thoroughly after applying the mulch.

7. Appropriate Maintenance

Generally, an established turf area needs only 1" of water once every 7 to 10 days. Over-watering encourages shallow root growth, causing grass to lose its ability to survive drought and low rainfall.

Helpful Tips:

- Water in the early morning hours (between 4 a.m. and 8 a.m.) to prevent evaporation.
- Water slowly & deeply so soil absorbs water 6" to 8" deep.
- Use slow-release fertilizers and reduce application rate after establishment. This is particularly important prior to or during dry periods.
- Leave grass clippings on turf to supply recycled nutrients and reduce the need for additional fertilizer.
- Raise the mower blade and cut the grass higher to encourage deeper rooting. This improves survival during drought & reduces water demand.
- Always keep the mower blades sharp - dull blades shred leaf tips, causing the turf to use more water.
- Relieve soil compaction to increase air and water movement into the soil by aerating when required - especially on slopes.



Developed by the Cobb County-Marietta Water Authority in conjunction with the Georgia Water Wise Council, and the Cobb County Cooperative Extension Service. Endorsed by: Georgia Green Industry Assn., Georgia Turf Assn., Metro Atlanta Lawn and Turf Assn., Paulding County Cooperative Extension Service, Marietta Council of Garden Clubs.