The Grapevine

Xeriscaping: a water-wise approach to landscaping

The heat is here to stay and with dangerously hot conditions coming later this week coupled with the extended drought many people have been struggling to keep their yards and flowers looking good these last couple years. With the dry conditions that have persisted in the area starting from fall of 2021 and running through this year there has been an increased interest in alternative lawn and landscaping practices both in the area and across the country. These collective practices are commonly termed “xeriscaping” which was coined by a group in Colorado to describe landscaping where water conservation is the main focus. Whatever you chose to do in your lawn, make sure it follows all city codes and requirements.

Xeriscaping was coined from the Greek word “xeros” meaning dry and scape which means the pattern of landscape. A well planned out xeriscape will result in an attractive, sustainable landscape that conserves water and is based on sound horticultural principles. There are many ways to develop and create a water-wise landscape from reducing the amount of lawn area to auditing your watering practices to using mulches to cover the ground and finally using plants that tolerate heat and drought conditions. The first step to creating a water wise lawn is to start with a plan that balances your aesthetic needs as well as your desire to conserve resources. Just a reminder, xeriscaping means reduce water usage not zero maintenance.

One of the biggest aspects of xeriscaping is reducing the amount of irrigated turf in your yard through a couple options. Xeriscaping doesn’t mean no turf, just well thought out areas such as removing hard to irrigate locations and tight corners that are hard to mow. The first option is to convert turf areas into alternatives that require less water to maintain. Keep the lawn grass in areas where it is functional including spots that have fair amounts of traffic or areas for pets and children to play. Transition steep slopes that are harder to water to groundcovers instead of turf. The second option is to transition the lawn to a grass option such as buffalograss or bermudagrass that requires less moisture than the traditional bluegrass or fescue yard. Turfgrass has it’s benefits in a water-wise landscape including reducing run-off and environmental pollution while also moderating the temperature in the area. It’s also important to remember you don’t have to water the lawn unless it’s absolutely necessary.

Auditing your watering practices can make a big difference in the amount of water you are using as proper irrigation can reduce water usage by 30-80%. Consider transitioning to soaker hoses or drip irrigation in flower beds to only water the areas necessary rather than sprinklers. If you use a sprinkler system, make sure your system is adequately covering the area desired and adjust if necessary. If possible, change your irrigation system from watering everything to just watering in zones as some areas of the yard won’t need as much water as others. Remember to water deeply and infrequently rather than shallow watering, trees and shrubs should be watered to a depth of 12-18” while lawns should be watered do a depth of 6-8” each time.

In any landscaping make sure to cover as much of the ground as possible with some type of mulch to reduce evaporation and help keep the soil temperature cooler. If you need to improve your soil consider using an organic mulch such as bark chips or shredded mulch to add organic material to the soil. Rock and inorganic mulches will also work in most options. You will ultimately need to choose what works for you and is readily available in your area. These are simply the first steps to being water wise in your home landscape and many can be done without any changes to your current landscaping.
It’s time to treat for bagworms!!! They have hatched in our area!!!!!

Insect of the Week- Japanese Beetle
These imported beetles originated in Japan (hence the name) where they were only minor pests in their environment. Unfortunately, in the US they are one of the most destructive pests of lawns, gardens and ornamental plants that gardeners deal with. These beetles have a one-year life cycle with the adults hatching in May and laying eggs in July. Adults are less than ½” in length with a metallic green head and a bronze-colored body. The larvae or grub form is white in color and shaped like a “C”. The grubs feed on the roots of lawn grasses under-ground during the fall before burrowing deeper in the soil to overwinter. They eventually pupate in late spring before hatching into adults. The adults are equal opportunity feeders but prefer roses, maple trees, grapes, elms and crabapples.

Most healthy plants can withstand a small number of Japanese beetles so general watering and fertilizing will help reduce the impact, however younger plants or vegetable crops can be quickly desiccated if numbers become too high (Like the grapevine in the picture, Photo courtesy of Nancy Gordon). If you have a small number of beetles on your plants, you can pick them off and throw them into a bucket of soapy water. Larger populations of beetles may require some chemical treatment. Neem Oil is an organic option however it only discourages the beetles from eating the plant and needs reapplied frequently. Spinosad is another organic option that kills the adults but again needs to be reapplied frequently. Any spraying should be done early in the morning or late in the evening to prevent harm to pollinators. Traps are not recommended as they attract more insects than enter the traps and can make feeding worse in the area rather than help control the issue.

Grubs are a major issue in some lawns. Most grasses can tolerate up to 10 grubs per square foot, however any number above that will cause dieback and browning of the grass. In heavily infested lawns the grass can be peeled up like a carpet due to grub feeding or it can be torn up by wildlife searching for the grubs. Control of the grubs should begin soon after they start to hatch in the late summer. Preventative herbicides can be applied up to four weeks before the eggs hatch and there are a wide variety of chemical options available. There is a biological option called Milky Spore Disease which has shown limited effectiveness against high populations and can take a while to establish but it only impacts Japanese Beetles and is an organic option. For more information on Japanese Beetles check out this publication: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/MF3488.pdf

Video of the week: Right Plant, Right Place
Even under the harshest of conditions, you can have a flowerbed that beautifies your landscape. All it takes is the right plant for the right place. With a little bit of regular care, you'll have color and texture to enjoy for the whole season. Watch the video here: https://kansashealthyyards.org/all-videos/video/right-plant-right-place

Frank and Ernest

Sorry to hear about the Root Canal.
Plant of the Week - Bald cypress
This week we are taking a look at one of the longest living trees in the world, the Bald cypress. This tree is native to southern swamps, bayous and rivers in coastal areas from Maryland to Texas and the lower Mississippi river valley. Despite its native range being mainly swamps and river beds the bald cypress is surprisingly drought hardy and is rated as one of the more drought tolerant trees you can plant once they get established. One of the unique features of this tree is that it is a deciduous conifer which means it loses its needles every year and regrows them in the spring which gives it the common name “bald” for its lack of needles in the winter. This tree can grow up to 150 feet tall and 30 feet wide with a trunk ranging in diameter from 3 to 6 feet at maturity. In a landscape setting they tend to be smaller as the trees are far younger than in its native range. As a conifer this tree does have “cones” in the form of green balls as seen in the photo above. The bald cypress is easily grown in average medium to wet soils in full sun to part shade but will tolerate dry areas or upland soils as well. Bald cypress develop “knees” or “cypress knees” when grown in standing water or near water. These knees allow the roots to take in oxygen from the air when oxygen is not available due to the water in the soil. These knees are less common in dry areas however the care should be taken when mowing around the trees to avoid damaging the mower on these knees. This tree is a wonderful option to use in areas that stay damp for extended periods of time, as a street tree or a shade tree in your yard. Because these trees are common in coastal areas they naturally have some salt tolerance for areas that struggle with that issue. This tree grows relatively quickly and can reach 40-50 feet in 15-25 years. These trees are relatively disease and insect free. The wood is naturally rot resistant and is commonly used in a variety of applications when the trees are harvested. One down side of this tree would be that the needles can be a pain to clean up in the fall much like any tree but in many cases the benefits far outweigh the issues.

Reminders-
- Prune off suckers on fruit trees as they appear.
- Prune off dead foliage from bulbs.
- Side dress tomatoes when they are full sized but still green. Do not over fertilize or you will get less fruit.
- Spray for Bagworms.

K-State Preserve it Fresh, Preserve it Safe
Food Preservation Training with Karen Blakeslee
Butler Community College Red Sea Institute of Culinary Arts
622 Cloud Avenue, Andover, KS
August 2023
9:00 AM - 4:00 PM
$40

Call our office or use link below to register:
https://tinyurl.com/2an8zzp5

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Upcoming Events

• **July 5th at Noon - Solutions to Your Top Garden Insect and Disease Problems**
  Insects, diseases, and weather-related problems are always an issue in the landscape & garden. Judy O'Mara, Director of the K-State Plant Disease Diagnostic Lab, and Dr. Raymond Cloyd, Extension Specialist in Horticultural Entomology, are here to help! Learn to identify and solve the plant problems you should be on the lookout for, and bring your insect & disease questions for assistance from our experts. This class is offered online via Zoom. For more information on the Garden Hour series or to register visit here: [https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/consumer-horticulture/garden-hour/](https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/consumer-horticulture/garden-hour/)

• **July 14-18, 2022: Butler County Fair**
  Don’t forget to stop by the Fairgrounds and check out all the 4-H and other exhibits at the Butler County Fair. Check out the Open class list and bring some of your projects or produce to exhibit at the fair this year!!! For more information, including the schedule and a list of Open class exhibits check out the fair website: [https://www.butler.k-state.edu/4hfair/](https://www.butler.k-state.edu/4hfair/)

• **August 2nd at Noon - Integrating Native Plants into your Home Landscape**
  Native plants are growing in popularity in the home landscape. Dr. Sharon Ashworth, Douglas County Horticulture & Natural Resources Extension Agent, will discuss the ecological benefits of native plants and how to successfully integrate natives into your landscape. Learn about what defines a native plant, which native plants work best, and what maintenance is required to grow a beautiful landscape of natives. This class is offered online via Zoom. For more information on the Garden Hour series or to register visit here: [https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/consumer-horticulture/garden-hour/](https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/consumer-horticulture/garden-hour/)

• **September 6th at Noon - Seed Saving from Your Garden**
  Seed saving is a fun way to enjoy gardening without breaking the bank. Most plants produce seeds that can be saved from one year to the next, however, not all seeds are equally suited for saving. Jesse Gilmore, Wildcat Extension District Horticulture Extension Agent, will discuss the merits of seed saving, the different types of flowers and seeds, and which plants are most suited to seed saving. This class is offered online via Zoom. For more information on the Garden Hour series or to register visit here: [https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/consumer-horticulture/garden-hour/](https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/consumer-horticulture/garden-hour/)

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