

## Tired of trying to keep your grass alive during these hot summer months? Water bills skyrocketing? D.I.Y. xeriscape may be the solution.

What is a xeriscape? “Xeris” is a Greek word meaning “dry.” “Xeriscape” refers to a low maintenance landscape that conserves water and protects the environment. Across the United States, nearly nine billion gallons of water are used each day for landscape irrigation. As water conservation becomes increasingly important, you may be interested in learning how you can use less water in your own yard.

When you hear “xeriscape,” you may think of just cactus and rock gardens. While many people enjoy that style of garden (including myself), if you prefer a green yard full of beautiful plants, you can still save water by selecting native perennials and shrubs.

There are seven principles of xeriscape:

1. planning and design;
2. soil improvement;
3. efficient irrigation;
4. appropriate low water plant selection;
5. rocks/mulch;
6. limiting lawn size; and
7. maintenance.

Let’s examine how these principles apply to South Texas landscapes.

### **Planning and design**

Consider aspect, shade, slope, soil and existing and desired species. The goal is to eliminate as much grass as possible to reduce water usage, cut back on labor and make maintaining your new xeriscape area easy.

## **Soil amendments**

One way to increase water-holding capacity is to add amendments such as compost. Add one inch of compost to the soil beds in the spring and fall and one-quarter inch over lawns during the same seasons.

## **Efficient irrigation**

The most efficient irrigation is rain, but we recommend using a hand-held hose or soaker hoses. In-ground irrigation systems, on the other hand, use 50 percent more water (70 percent in the summer) than a hose-end sprinkler or hand-held hose.

## **Appropriate plant selection**

Use native plants or ones that are well adapted to our area. My personal favorites are cacti, succulents, salvias, firecracker fern and iris.

## **Rocks/Mulch**

Two to three inches of mulch, whether organic like woodchips, or river rock or half-inch washed limestone are sufficient.

## **Limited lawn**

Lawns require excessive water to maintain, especially in Texas during the summer months. By implementing a xeriscape design, you reduce your footprint and dramatically reduce water usage, which saves you money.

## **Maintenance**

The only maintenance that is necessary is minimal watering, weeding and pruning, depending on plant selection. Without the need to fertilize or mow, you'll be able to spend less time maintaining your yard and more time enjoying it.

Come visit and enjoy the Briscoe's very own McNutt Sculpture Garden, which is a good example of a xeriscape space.

Step One: Clear existing grass



Step Two: Remove dirt and grass debris



Step Three: Level dirt in preparation for laying down landscape fabric



Step Four: Roll out landscape fabric



Step Five: Secure fabric to ground by using 4 - 6" garden staples



Step Six: Time to dump your rocks or mulch down



Step Seven: Spread your rocks or mulch evenly atop fabric



**Step Eight:** Fill entire area with chosen rock/mulch



**Step Nine:** Select native plants that require low watering and maintenance. This is the fun part where you get to design your own unique arrangement and composition. I opted for a minimal design, making sure to measure equally between plants for a well-balanced look.



**Step Ten:** Cut a cross pattern in your landscape fabric large enough to accommodate you plant.

Dig a hole, place plant, and replace the cut fabric flaps around the base of plant.



Sit back, relax and admire your new xeriscape!



