



MISSION: BEAUTIFICATION ... CONSERVATION ... EDUCATION

Planting and Nurturing

SEPTEMBER, 2019

Volume: IV Number: 5

Gardening Issue: Linda Doiron, Editor

Environmental Edition: May, August, November, February - Mary Lovings, Editor

Gardening Edition: June, September, December, March – Linda Doiron, Editor

Landscape Design: July, October, January, April - Suzanne Finger, Editor

Not a Drop to Spare

My friend can't afford to pay her water bill this month, so I sent her a card, "Get well soon." Here in Georgia, our state's most precious resource is water, and making efficient use of water should be an everyday goal. All landscaping projects can benefit from the thoughtful process of water conservation, and that is why I am writing about xeriscape designs in your Georgia garden.

Xeriscaping principles support water conservation through the use of native and drought-tolerant plants, thus a gardener can select from a large variety of plants in Georgia. The process begins with a deliberate design that groups plants by their water needs. The idea is to look for ways to reduce the amount of applied water.

Besides saving water, other important benefits of a xeriscape design include less maintenance (aside from pruning and weeding), elimination of most fertilizers or pesticides, and promotion of wildlife habitats.

Certain steps are essential to a successful xeriscape garden.

1. Proper Planning for Water Conservation

Be sure to organize your plot by identifying:

- sun and shade areas;
- north, south, east and west;
- drainage and natural contours to reduce soil loss and erosion;
- seating, walkways, dining and play areas;
- turf area (try to minimize);
- large plantings (such as trees and shrubs) so as to effectively position them;
- native or drought tolerant plants; and
- groups of plants with similar watering needs.

2. Soil Improvement

By increasing the amount of organic material in your soil and keeping it well aerated, you can achieve the dual goals of quick drainage and storing water at the same time.

3. Create Limited Turf Areas

It takes a lot of water to keep your grass green, and a good look at the use of turf areas is important to your xeriscape garden. Take into account where grass will be useful and enhance the garden with the goal of reducing the size of turf areas as much as possible. You can replace heavy foot traffic areas with walkways (using water-permeable materials) or ground covers. In other areas, add a variety of grasses that only require low water usage.

4. Use Appropriate Plants and Plant Locations

- Use native and/or drought-resistant plants. Try plants with small, thick, glossy, silver-grey, or fuzzy leaves, or thick stems – all characteristics which help them store water. Check for winter hardiness. Select plants for their overall size to reduce pruning and weeding.
- For those hot, dry areas with south and west exposure, use plant combinations that need a minimum amount of water. Drought-loving plants tend to do better at higher elevations. Along north and east-facing areas, choose plants that like more moisture. The most important principle here is not to mix plants with high- and low-watering needs in the same planting area.
- Choose trees that can help to reduce evaporation by blocking wind and providing shade.
- Arrange plants in blocks instead of rows because watering a block of plants is more efficient than spraying water over a long row. For easy and reachable access, design your blocks with a maximum 3-foot width.
- Space your plants in a tight pattern. It will create a full design allowing plants to support each other, suppress weeds and slow water evaporation from the soil.

5. Mulch

Mulching your garden several inches thick with leaves, compost, pine needles, wood chips, bark or gravel will help:

- retain soil moisture (so that it takes less water to keep plants alive),
- moderate temperature,
- prevent erosion, and
- block out competing weeds.

6. Irrigate

It's best to water deeply and less frequently, and to water plants at the right time of day; for instance, water in-ground plants in the morning and containers in the afternoon. Soaker hoses

and drip-irrigation systems offer the most efficient watering because they deliver water directly to the base of the plant. Harvest rain water by setting up a rain barrel. Recycle water whenever possible.

7. Maintain Your Landscape

Low-maintenance is achieved with planning properly to minimize weeding and pruning. Keep your grass taller to retain moisture.

Xeric Plants

Plants suited to xeriscape gardens are sometimes referred to as "xeric" plants. These are generally native and/or drought-tolerant herbs, perennials, vegetables, trees, shrubs and ground covers. Here are some choices for you to consider.

Herbs: Herbs are plants for all seasons and situations, and are a great addition in a landscape designed for low water use. Some of the best designs use herbs intermingled with native wildflowers and vegetables. Here are some herb suggestions for your fall garden:

- Chives
- Mint
- Oregano
- Parsley
- Rosemary
- Lavender
- Sage
- Thyme

Perennials: Arrange three rows of companion perennials into a block with tall plants dominating the back row including a focal point such as ornamental grass; a middle row staggered with intermediate height perennials; and a third front row of shorter height drought-resistant plants.

Short height:

- Candytuft- (12")
- Sedum- (18")

Medium height:

- Butterfly Weed (24")
- Coreopsis- (24")
- Rudbeckia- (24")
- Phlox- (24")
- Yarrow (24")

Tall:

- Arkansas bluestar- (36")
- Gaura- (36")
- Baptisia- (48")
- Coneflowers- (48")
- Lantana- Miss Huff (60")

Vegetables: There are many vegetables out there that will compliment your xeriscape garden. Companion planting is a Native American planting method where plants are placed in the same beds so that they benefit from each other. The classic “3 Sisters” trio of corn, beans and squash is perfect for a drought-tolerant vegetable garden.

Fall vegetables for planting in Georgia include beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, lettuce, mustard, onion, radishes, spinach and turnips.



*These pictures are from Discovery Garden Park in Norcross, GA. The members of Discovery Garden Park and Norcross Garden Club recently hosted Annandale villagers to the Park where they painted rocks for the pepper and kale garden.

Read more about it:

Flowering perennials:

<https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=B944&title=Flowering%20Perennials%20for%20Georgia%20Gardens>

Georgia Vegetable Calendar:

<https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=C943&title=Vegetable%20Garden%20Calendar>

Native Plants in Georgia (including trees, shrubs and grasses):

The Georgia Native Plant Society <https://gnps.org/>

Walter Reeves, the Georgia Gardener <https://www.walterreeves.com/landscaping/native-plants-for-georgia/>

Water Conservation:

<https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=C1010&title=Tips%20for%20Saving%20Water%20in%20the%20Landscape>

So long, Applied Water. You will be mist.

Be Well,

Linda Doiron

The Hokey Gardener

