

ENJOYING A LOW-MAINTENANCE LANDSCAPE

Story by Mark Carter

TIME IS A PRECIOUS COMMODITY TODAY. Between the work week and all

the extra activities that life presents, it's tough to find time to work in the garden. We all want a beautiful garden right outside the door, but the question becomes "Can I keep and maintain a beautiful garden or landscape that is beautiful, pollution-free and low-maintenance?"

The answer to this question is yes.

Times are changing. The old ideas of huge, green, weed-free lawns and rows of sheared and shaped hedges are becoming a thing of the past. For good reason too. These landscapes are tough to mow and trim, they require large amounts of chemical fertilizers and herbicides to maintain turf quality, they need large quantities of water and they must be pruned and trimmed three to five times each year. Not only do most of us lack the needed time, but we also are aware of the impact these chemicals and wasted water have on our environment. That's where the idea of xeriscaping comes in.

XERISCAPE (zir-i-scape) is a term applied to a landscaping principle that employs drought-resistant plants and gardening practices in an effort to conserve resources, especially water. This idea originally took off in the arid West and Southwest. Now, however, the principle is employed throughout the country. The ideas are simple:

1. Save water.
2. Greatly reduce maintenance;
3. Reduce or eliminate the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

And do all these things while improving property value and personal enjoyment of the property.



I call this a Zen Fountain. A bamboo spout pouring into a granite bowl, then disappearing into the gravel below. It's simple, but also very elegant. It completely fills the air with sound and is extremely low maintenance. This would be a great addition to any courtyard or garden.

DESIGN IDEAS

Don't think this is all cactus-and-gravel. With a proper design, this principle can be incorporated into almost any gardening style. You can apply it to any part of your landscape and in any part of the country.

Every successful project begins with a good design. A simple sketch will work in most cases. Get out a measuring tape and record all the property boundaries and the orientation to North/South/East/West. Sketch in structures, walkways and drives, fences and trees. Note play spaces and patios, also note any micro-climates on the property (sunny and dry, full shade, damp, etc.). Think about drainage. You can use those drain swales and terraces to a wonderful effect with dry creeks and aquatic planting pockets. You can also conserve water and reduce pollution with smart practices like the use of rain gardens and rain barrels.

The plants you use are paramount to the success of a low-maintenance garden. Take a look at some local nurseries, go on a garden or pond tour for ideas and pay a visit to your local State Agriculture Extension Office for information on native, low-maintenance, drought-resist-

Here are some basic plant lists to help get you started.

There are lots of plants available, so have some fun and go out to a local nursery or two and check out all the possibilities. You can also check with your local state agricultural agent for help with native plant lists. I also recommend going on a garden or pond tour. You will get some new ideas and meet other interested gardeners in the process.

Perennials

Cardinal flower
Yucca
Yarrow
Iris
Lavender
Sage
Thyme
Rosemary
Black-eyed Susan
Aster



Sedum
Coreopsis
Purple or white coneflower
Columbine
Phlox
Lamb's ear
Creeping Jenny
Hosta
Verbena
St. John's wart

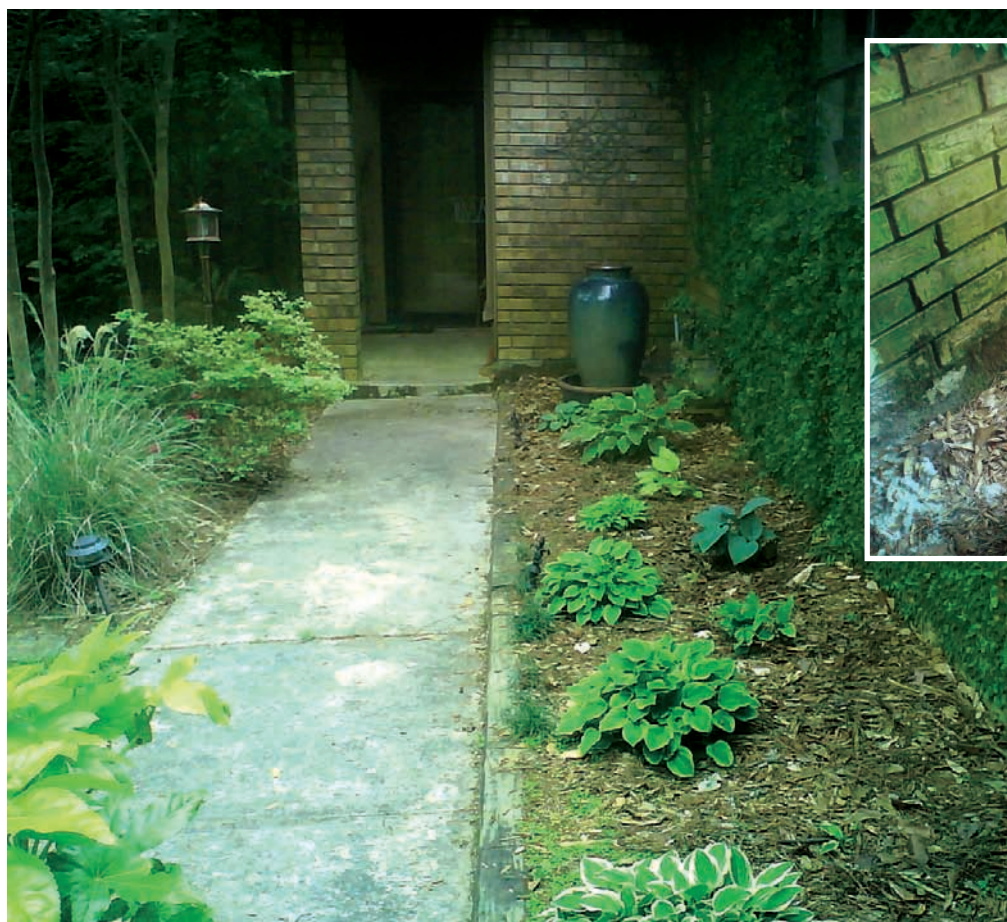


Trees and Shrubs

Spirea
Butterfly bush
Orn. grasses
Junipers
Euonymus
Witch hazel
Sassafras
River birch
Tulip poplar
Sugar maple



Native azalea
Washington hawthorne
White dogwood
Redbud
Rhododendron
American holly
Beech
Privet
Honeysuckle
Forsythia



▲ This overflowing pot is an effective low-maintenance choice. By carefully selecting the pot or urn you choose, you can adapt this installation to almost any style garden. You will have to add water from time to time, but not daily, as in a conventional fountain. You can even hook up an auto-fill line to take care of that for you.

LOW-MAINTENANCE LANDSCAPE

Your water feature can **require less maintenance** and less water than the same area if it were planted in turf grass.

A properly designed water garden with a beautiful waterfall, native aquatic plants and ornamental fish can be not only extremely low maintenance, but also an investment that adds value to your property and enriches your life.

ant plants for your area. Group plants with similar watering needs and sun/shade tolerance together for better efficiency. Also think about mature plant size. This forethought will greatly reduce future maintenance.

A few other points to consider: Reduce lawn area and increase the time you get to enjoy the garden in the process.

Amend the soil with lots of compost and organic matter. This will increase fertility and decrease the fertilizer needed to use in the future. It will also help with the conservation of water.

Mulch. Covering the soil with a mulch does many things. It keeps weeds down, it helps retain moisture and soil temperature, and it reduces erosion and wash. You can even put down landscape fabric under the mulch to all but eliminate weeds in the garden.

WATER IN THE LANDSCAPE

The number one thing homeowners across America want to add to their landscape is.....?

You guessed it: a water feature. That's not just me talking. That statistic is backed up by a *USA Today* poll taken all around North America. And guess what the good news is. Your water feature can require less maintenance and less water than the same area if it were planted in turf grass.

HOW? BY DESIGN OF COURSE...

Many low-maintenance options exist for water features today. The most popular options I recommend are the pondless waterfalls and custom disappearing fountains. Container water gardens are also growing in popularity, mainly for their size and for the way they make it possible to bring water and sound almost anywhere. These features can transform a bland area in the garden or home into a magical oasis.

With a high-efficiency pump, adequate water-holding capacity and the ability to capture and hold water, these features are smart and cool.

Well there you have it folks: A quick lesson on the basics of low-maintenance gardening and an introduction to the principle of xeriscaping.

You can put some of these practices into effect right away and I trust they will save you time & money and provide you with more time to enjoy life's abundance. 🌿



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▲ This is a great display idea of how to create a dry creek bed. Gorgeous, functional and about as low-maintenance as you can get.