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Saving Water Can Save You Money

Many people believe that a colorful and vibrant garden needs lots of water. In reality, the same can be achieved through the application of Xeriscape practices, which can result in water savings of 35% to 70%. Xeriscape landscaping is based on seven principles and defined as water conservation through creative and appropriate landscaping. While many of these principles have been used in traditional landscaping for years, Xeriscape incorporates all seven into one method. When all seven principles are implemented correctly and together, the result is a significant reduction in water consumption without the loss of the beauty that landscaping provides.

Planning and Design

Start with an accurate plan of the site. Identify site problems and potentials, and develop a list of needs and wants to be incorporated into the new plan. As your plan begins to take form, implement what is called Hydrozoning - - which is the grouping of plants according to their water, sunlight, and maintenance needs.

Soil Analysis

Evaluate the planting soil, including its structure, texture, water holding capacity and drainage. Soil should be able to promote good root growth while allowing water penetration and water retention. Let the physical and chemical characteristics of the existing soil be your guide in determining the type of soil improvements needed.

Appropriate Turf Area

Turf grass in residential areas occupies the largest area and when managed incorrectly receives the largest amount of irrigation. Considerable water savings can obtained by irrigating only the turf in the high impact and highly visible areas of the landscape. Select a turf grass that is adapted to the site and has good drought resistance. As irrigated space decreases, water saving increases.

Even if you don't replant, here are ten ways you can save water in your community.

1. **Check your irrigation controller once a month, and adjust as necessary.** Most plants require only one-third as much water in winter as they do in summer. You should reprogram for the seasons.

2. **Fix leaking sprinklers, valves, and pipes.** One broken spray sprinkler can waste 10 gallons per minute or 100 gallons in a typical 10 minute watering cycle.

3. **Move turf away from sidewalks and pavement.** Instead, plant shrubs or ground covers next to the pavement, and water with low-flow drip or bubbler systems to eliminate runoff from turf sprinklers.

4. **Check the soils moisture level before watering.** You can reduce your water use 20-50% by regularly checking the soil before watering.

5. **Water high water-use plants separately from low water-use plants.** Low water-use plants can grow with one-half the water needed by high water-use plants, and can be easily damaged from over watering.

6. **Apply as little fertilizer as possible.** If you use fertilizer, make sure it stays on the landscape, and carefully water it in so there is NO runoff.

7. **Replace turf with ground covers, trees, and shrubs.** If you have areas where no one uses the grass, patches that do not grow well, or a turf area too small to water without runoff, consider replacing the turf with water-efficient landscaping.

8. **Dig-up patches of weeds and undesirable grasses from turf areas.** Use water to grow the turf you want, not the weeds you don't want! Once you have eliminated what you don't want, add sod or over-seed to repair the bare areas.

9. **Change spray sprinklers to low-flow bubbler or drip systems.** Shrubs and trees are ideal candidates for this type of irrigation because the water is applied directly to the root zone.

10. **Adjust the water pressure of your irrigation system.** Spray sprinklers work best at 30 pounds per square inch (psi), and gear and impact rotor sprinklers at 40-60 psi.

Appropriate Plant Selection

Select plants that not only are compatible with the design, but also are well suited to the planning site and local environment. In addition to the adaptability of plant material to a site, there are important criteria to consider: mature size and form, growth rate, texture, color, and functional use.

Appropriate Maintenance

Keep plants healthy, but do not encourage water demanding new growth. Once plants are established, reduce the amount of nitrogen applied, as well as the application rate and frequency of application. Avoid plant stress by mowing properly, thinning shrubs instead of shearing and by controlling weeds and pests before they affect plant health.

Conclusions

With proper planning, the conservation-conscious gardener will find that less water can mean more favorable results for the garden, for the community, for our ecosystem. Why not give Xeriscape a try!