

Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery Success Sheet No. 118

Xeriscaping

Purpose

Xeriscaping has been the general direction of the landscaping industry for the last few years. The goal is to design, create and maintain a landscape that conserves water. Xeriscaping techniques are beneficial financially, environmentally, and esthetically. Seven basic horticultural aspects are applied.

Design

Two design principles are involved in xeriscape design: site analysis and planting plan. Site analysis shows existing conditions such as slope, drainage, existing plants, and structures. The planting plan is the placement of plants to be installed. Increasing shaded areas can decrease the plants' needs for water.

Soil

Addition of organic matter to soil improves water retention. Homemade compost, manure or topsoil are some options.

Planting adaptable plants in the soil right away may eliminate the need for soil improvements.

Zones

Placing plants in the correct area is the key to successful xeriscape gardens. Plant according to their sunlight, water, and soil needs.

Plants' growing zones are crucial to know for planting purposes. The most beneficial plants for xeriscape gardens are "natural zone" plants that require only natural rainfall or "drought-tolerant zone" plants that require minimal irrigation.

Turf

Grass uses more water and requires more maintenance than any other part of

landscaping. The grass should be limited to areas for recreation and leisure.

Consider alternatives to grass such as attractive groundcover plantings, decks, patios and walkways.

Irrigation

Grouping plants according to their water needs is also important. Select correct irrigation methods for the type of plants being watered. Watering in the early morning or late evening works best.

Microsprinklers aim for the roots, reducing evaporation, and should be used for trees, shrubs and ornamentals. Hand watering is more accurate but time consuming.

Mulches

A 2- to 3-inch layer of mulch minimizes evaporation from the soil, reduces weeds, and moderates soil temperature. Mulched beds are an alternative to grass.

Organic mulches include shredded or wood chips, pine needles and leaves. Inorganic mulches, such as stone or gravel, can be used as well.

Maintenance

Two common maintenance mistakes are over-watering and over-fertilizing. Over-watering increases water bills, disease, and plant replacement costs.

Over-fertilizing encourages fast growth, which is weak, making plants vulnerable to freezing and breakage in high winds. Excessive growth increases water usage for the plant.

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