



Taking Drought-Resistant Landscapes For a Dry Run

In the July issue of units, Lee outlined how communities can benefit from year-round ground's management. This month, drought-tolerant landscaping ideas are offered.

BY CHRIS LEE

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ore than 2,100 daily high temperature records were matched or shattered across the U.S. during the last week of June, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Widespread drought continues to plague much of the country, meaning property managers need to reach a little deeper into their wheelbarrows for landscape options that don't require as much water.

Drought is expected to persist or intensify in most of the southern half of the United States in 2012, according to the National Weather Service Climate Prediction Center, with the most severe impact on the southern Eastern Seaboard and Southwest. Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Kansas, Texas, Alabama, Georgia, Florida and South Carolina remain gripped by "exceptional" or "extreme" droughts, with little relief in sight.

Landscapers across the Southwest are receiving an increasing number of calls from concerned property owners about their water-starved landscapes. But lack of rainfall, depleted reservoirs and water restrictions don't mean that property beds and gardens should become sandboxes. Many varieties of drought-tolerant plants and grasses offer pleasing and sustainable solutions.

Beautiful variations of contrasting colored rocks and fairly sparse plantings can evoke the effect of a healthy landscape that's easy on the eyes. Done properly, a property can feature a beautiful and long-term landscape that will go easy on the water bill.

When considering a drought-tolerant landscape, just look around. Identify what is growing without man-made irrigation or supplementation. What you see in the wild, on the side of the road or in open areas is successfully playing the hand dealt by Mother Nature.

Species vary from region to region, depending on climate, and some can be unattractive. But there are a great number of desirable plants, trees, bushes and grasses that, when placed in a similar environment to their natural setting, will flourish and give property owners a low-maintenance option during periods of limited rain and water supply.

Following are some property management tips to help beat the drought.



sage



oleander



yucca



photinia



1. Get it Established

As with all flora, the key to long-term growth is establishment. Don't discount the fact that any kind of landscaping, whether or not it's drought-tolerant, needs time to take root and requires water upfront. And no matter how drought-tolerant the plant, it will have some issues with transplant shock and sensitivity to new surroundings.

Adequate watering during the first couple of months post-planting is critical, as is keeping a close eye on progress. The plant will reveal what it needs if you pay attention. Once drought-tolerant landscaping is established, it should be able to survive on natural rainfall alone.

2. Types of Drought-Tolerant Plant Life

Each part of the country has native plants with unique tolerances for drought, and communities would do well to consult area horticulturists and landscape professionals for appropriate selections. Again, take note of what's growing around the area that doesn't require much intervention.

In Texas and the Southwest, for example, red bud trees, sages and any kind of succulent—such as yuccas and agaves—do well. Some varieties of crepe myrtles also fare really well. In Florida, Cuban buttercups, devil's backbone and the jelly burn plants are drought-tolerant perennials. Black chokeberry, golden alexanders and roundleaf dogwoods grow well in Michigan in drier soils.

A number of ornamental and maiden grasses are fairly drought tolerant and are sustainable. Muhly grass, known as *Muhlenbergia Capillaries*, is a common ornamental grass that adds vibrant color to a property and can survive with limit-



ed moisture. The grass has beautiful pinkish and reddish blooms instead of white, which are common on most other grasses.

3. Rock On

Many drought-tolerant landscapes will incorporate rock and boulders as ornaments, which, of course, require no water. As evidenced by recent requests, one stone that is making a comeback is lava rock, which was popular as recently as the 1970s and '80s.

Natural rocks are available in a variety of colors and can add a distinctive presence to a property's landscaping. They are inexpensive (and don't require irrigation) and make great center-

pieces. Most stone specialists have ample rocks from the region, as well as other types of stones that can add an always-maintained look to any landscape.

Rather than surrounding a red-tip photinia with monkey grass, consider stylishly situating a large rock indigenous to the region amid muhly grass.

4. Turf Alternatives

Decomposed granite is a great alternative to turf because it can be compacted to a point where it's easy to walk on and easy for pets to run on. Decomposed granite is small, weathered chunks of granite that takes on the look and feel of gravel or coarse sand.

Most common uses are for driveways, garden walkways and heavy-use paths. It compacts well and comes in a variety of colors.

Deciding on a drought-tolerant landscape can involve a little strategy, but for the most part, Mother Nature already has a plan in place nearby. Even in the most severe drought conditions, there remain strategies for creating and maintaining an attractive, well-groomed landscape. **NAA**



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