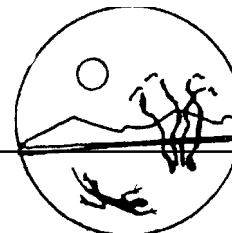


High on the Desert

Cochise County Master Gardener

Newsletter



The University of Arizona and U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating.

What I've Learned About Xeriscaping— Got Mulch?

This month we will discuss **Xeriscape Principle #5** "Use Mulches" and **Xeriscape Principle #4** "Soil Improvements." This is often confusing because the same materials can be used for mulches and soil improvements but they serve different functions in the garden. The materials to choose from are organic matter (bark or wood chips, leaf mold, grass clippings, compost, hay, straw) or inorganic matter (gravel, decorative rocks, sand, boulders, decomposed granite).

What is Mulch? It is a 2-3 inch layer of organic or inorganic materials that covers the top of the soil around the root zones of plants. Its duty is to conserve water, inhibit weeds, and modify soil temperatures.

The most important rule before choosing a mulch is to research the plants growing requirements and then choose the appropriate mulch

to match the plant. There's nothing more disappointing than planting a rose garden using a gravel mulch only to watch the roses fry and die. As a general rule, native plants enjoy inorganic mulches, "exotic" plants like organic mulches, and straw, hay, or compost mulch is great for vegetable gardens.

When choosing decorative rocks for mulch keep in mind that the light colored rocks reflect heat. Stay away from white or gray gravel. Sure it's inexpensive but it reflects a lot of heat not only around plants but the home. This reflected heat forces the cooler work harder to keep the house comfortable in summer and can cause plants to transpire more and require additional water. Dark colored rocks absorb heat and radiate heat back out as nighttime temperatures cool. This can assist non-hardy plants by keeping them warm at night. Also be aware that colored rocks fade in our intense sunlight after awhile and may need an occasional topdressing.

My favorite rock mulch is a mixture of one color in all the sizes

available. I had a tough time deciding how to mulch my Texas Ranger room. I knew what color I liked but couldn't figure out what size to choose—a mulch of the same sized rock looked too formal. One day while hiking I observed not only the plants but also the ground around them. Taking the cues that Mother Nature showed me I decided to select a mixture of rock sizes in Apache Brown. The result is a really nice natural, informal appearance.

Mulches, sadly overlooked, are "living mulches." When designing a garden place, plant so that at maturity the plants will create their own "shade mulch." This requires planting a natural garden so plants will grow into each other ever so slightly but not so much that unnecessary pruning is required. The ratio of the mature garden would be enough plants to cover $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of the ground space as opposed to the wide expanses of gravelscapes with a plant here and there so often seen today. Use native grasses and wildflowers to fill in the spaces between plants.

(continued on next page)

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(520) 384-3594

What are soil improvements? They are organic, or in some cases inorganic, materials that are incorporated into the soil. Their duty is to improve the soil for specific reasons, such as adding compost to the vegetable garden, improving drainage in a manageable area, or amending the soil for “exotic” plants.

When it comes to what type of material to add to soils to improve it, I think there is nothing better than good ole’ compost. Compost is decayed plant and kitchen waste and farm animal manure. It adds nutrients and organic matter to the soil and stimulates soil micro-organisms. Compost can improve drainage in tight, clay soils and increase water retention in sandy soils. Finished compost should be dark, crumbly, and smell great—like the earth. Compost is often called “Black Gold” because it is so valued by gardeners. The good thing is that anyone can make compost. It can also be purchased bagged at nursery centers.

Here is my two-cents worth about peat moss. I steer away from it. I made the mistake of adding bags and bags of peat moss to a garden years ago. Its one benefit is that it holds a lot of water. Its downfall is that once it dries out it becomes crusty, sheds water, and is very difficult to rewet! But more importantly peat is a finite resource. It takes hundreds of years for it to form because it is derived from decomposed plant debris in bogs. Unfortunately bogs in Ireland and northern Europe have already been depleted. Why take an important resource out of bogs and wetlands when we can recycle (and keep out of the landfills) our kitchen, garden, and farm animal wastes to make superior compost

High on the Desert

Just a short time until the
High Desert Gardening & Landscaping
Conference!!!

If you haven’t registered yet, please use the form enclosed in this newsletter—
you won’t even have to pay the late fee.
See YOU there!

for our gardens! Spring is upon us, try something new, have some fun and make compost!

For more information on this subject check out your local library. They carry many good books on composting. One of my favorite books on mulches, soil improvements, cover crops, composting, and more is *Rodale’s Successful Organic Gardening Improving the Soil*. Also, the Cooperative Extension office has a bulletin *Home Compost in Arizona, the Lazy Way*. Call for your free copy.

Next time: Going Native?—How to decipher gardening books and choose the right plant for your garden.

Cheri Melton
Master Gardener



Robert E. Call
Extension Agent, Horticulture
Carolyn Gruenhagen
Editor

Cuttings ‘N’ Clippings

► Cochise County Master Gardeners Association meets February 7 at 5:00 p.m. at the Siera Vista Library.

► Upcoming spring garden events:
Boyce Thompson Arboretum
37615 U.S. 60, Superior, AZ
(520) 689-2723
Language of Flowers February
Flower Show and Chocolate
Tasting, February 10-11, 8am-5pm

Tucson Botanical Gardens
2150 N Alvernon, Tucson, AZ
(520) 326-9686
Spring Plant Sale, Mar 17 & 18,
9am-4pm
Home Garden Tour, Mar 31, Apr 1
Herb Fair, April 21
Weird Plant Sale, June 23

Desert Survivors
1020 W 22nd St, Tucson
(520) 884-8806
Spring Plant Sale, Mar 31, Apr 1,
8am-5pm

Tohono Chul Park
7366 N Paseo del Norte, Tucson
Spring Plant Sale, March 17, 9-5
& 18, 10-4pm
Wildflower Festival, April 1

Lessons From Another World

Recently, I was quite privileged to be able to journey to Singapore and Nepal. The trip was primarily a hiking trip that took me throughout the varied topography of the Kingdom of Nepal. While I was dragging my old tired bones up and down the Himalayan foothills I took particular note of the very different flora that was present and tried to make sense of all that I saw. This was sometimes difficult when I was gasping for air after ascending a particularly difficult set of stairs up the mountain trail (only to have to endure watching aged Nepalese men and women scurry past me nonchalantly). Nevertheless, I made a few observations there that I would love to share with all of you.

I have never seen such incredible natural beauty. It is quite stunning to be trudging along a trail and see a spot of brilliant red up ahead and watch in amazement as it grew nearer and having the realization that that red spot was actually a twenty foot tall Poinsettia tree growing wild along a raging tributary of the Ganges. It was humbling to have the honor of walking under a canopy of hundred foot tall Rhododendron trees while snow capped Anapurna towered nearby. The abundance of water and humidity and year round warmth made ferns and wild orchids plentiful. Water was everywhere—oozing from the rocks and cascading down the mountainsides.

The wildness of the flora and topography was in stark contrast to what I saw in Singapore. Orchids, palms, bougainvillea, *etc.* everywhere. Everything so managed and clipped and painstakingly maintained to perfection. The Singaporeans evidently take great pride in their environment and it showed! I was impressed.

How different all this was from the environment of Southeast Arizona that I am used to. But I think all the tropical abundance only made me appreciate even more the beauty of the southwest. The environment in Nepal and Singapore is much more benign that what we find here in Cochise County. Nevertheless, flora abounds in this much more hostile environment; it flourishes and gives us incredible natural displays. The dazzling brilliance of Arizona's wildflowers after a good winter rainy season can't be rivaled.

And you know what, I didn't see one gardener in either Nepal or Singapore attempting to grow desert plants. They are content to savor the flora that is native or adaptive to their area and feel no need to try to alter the environment to grow cacti. Why then, I muse, do we seem hellbent on trying to change Arizona by attempting to grow what is not really meant to be here. I think that the greatest gift that we can give to Mother Earth is to be content with where we are and appreciate the uniqueness of that place. I personally feel that there is as much beauty in a southwestern landscape as there is in a manicured French garden in Versailles, a rambling English garden in Sussex, acres of tulips

and hyacinths in Holland, or towering Rhododendrons in the hills of Nepal. Capitalize on what you have and savor it.

Environmental degradation was also quite evident. We are definitely not alone in ignoring the restraints that Mother Nature puts upon us. One of my photographs of the rice paddies ascending, seemingly forever up the side of a mountain in Nepal, shows the effects of deforestation as a huge swath of the mountainside had given way. Urban sprawl is not unique to the Valley of the Sun as Katmandu is gobbling up the countryside and wrecking havoc with the local flora as well. Cars belch out smoke and haze surrounds the city much like that one sees as he approaches Phoenix.

I truly enjoyed my trip and look forward to other trips to Asia. Nevertheless, it was wonderful to come back to my little piece of turf on the side of the Huachuca Mountains. I delighted in the tropical flora during my trip but see no need to transform my garden to emulate it. Rather, I am content to continue on a journey of discovery here in the Southwest. I know my Southwest garden is just as beautiful and full of surprises as any tropical paradise. One has only to open one's eyes to the endless possibilities and accept the here and now and be content.

*John Phillips
Master Gardener*

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What's Xeriscape and Why Should I Have It?

Sounds like some kind of affliction, doesn't it? Well, you could be very distressed if you don't have it! Xeriscape or low water use landscaping, is the easiest, most carefree type of landscape you can have anywhere—from Florida to the high desert. The term was coined in 1986 by a group of Denver water conservation professionals. It was the beginning of an educational movement to change the way landscapes are designed.

Here in the Southwest, many of us rely solely on diminishing supplies of groundwater. Landscapes are a main focus for water use reduction as this is where the most water is used - and can easily be saved. If we can have beautiful landscapes while being water conserving—why not? By following the principles of xeriscape, the homeowner can design, install and enjoy their environment while feeling proud that they are being good stewards of their natural resources.

OK, I'll get off of the soap box and get to the point. Come to a **free** workshop!

"Xeriscape and Why Should I Have It?" is the third in a monthly series of workshops from the Water Wise program. This session will cover the seven principles of Xeriscape: Planning and Design, Soils, Practical Turf, Plants, Watering, Mulching and Maintenance. The class will take some of the hour long workshop to walk

around the grounds of The University of Arizona South to look at how some of these principles have been integrated into the landscape.

This free workshop will be held Saturday, March 3 from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. at The University of Arizona South, 1140 N. Colombo, Sierra Vista (behind Cochise College) in Room 108. For a full schedule contact the Water Wise Program at 458-8278 Ext. 2141 or visit our web site at www.ag.arizona.edu/cochise/waterwise

Cado Daily, Water Conservation Educator, Water Wise Program



Water Facts

Eighty percent of the earth's surface is water. More than 97% of this water is in the oceans; 2% is locked in polar icecaps; and less than 1% is in freshwater lakes, streams, and groundwater.

Groundwater can take a human lifetime just to traverse a mile.

Groundwater accounts for 50% of our drinking water, 40% of irrigation water, 80% of all rural water use (household and livestock) and 25% of self-supplied industrial water use.

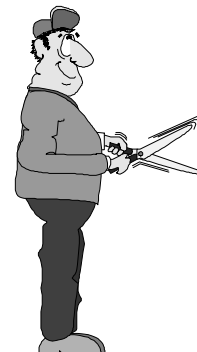
The EPA estimates that 25% of all Americans get their water from private wells. The remaining population uses some 60,000 public water systems (nearly 2/3 of these serve populations of 500 or fewer).

Call's Comments ...

Pruning of fruit trees should be done when trees are dormant, after rest is completed in the winter. Rest is a physiological stage where tree buds cannot be forced to grow even under ideal conditions. Generally rest is completed at the end of December. Pruning can begin in January and continue through bloom in the spring. However, dead or diseased limbs and root sucker growth can be removed at any time.

Roses that bloom several times during the year should be dormant pruned during late winter or early spring before new growth begins. Roses that bloom only once during the year are pruned after flowering, normally late spring or summer.

*Robert E. Call
Extension Agent, Horticulture*



February Reminders

- Winter pruning
- Prune rose bushes
- Cold-moist stratify seeds
- Plant bare-root trees
- Prepare spring planting beds
- Clean and repair drip irrigation systems
- Finalize spring garden plans
- Keep watering!!!

High on the Desert

Date _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____

Full Conference \$60.00

Thursday & Friday
(After February 2, \$70.00)

One Day \$40.00

Check 1: _____ Thursday _____ Friday
(After February 2, \$45.00)

Amount Enclosed _____

(No refunds after February 2, 2001)

Please make check payable to: **CCMGA**

Mail to:

CCMGA

1140 N. Colombo

Sierra Vista, AZ 85635

HURRY!
Register with this form and
late fee will be waived!
Good only through Feb. 9!

To help with our planning, indicate preference
for each session - this is very important this year!

I	II	III	IV	V	VI
A	A	A	A	A	A
B	B	B	B	B	B
C	C	C	C	C	C

Handicap access for steps to dining room

will be provided

_____ **I will need handicap assistance**

For information call:

The U. of A. Cooperative Extension Office
Sierra Vista, AZ (520) 458-8278, Ext. 2141

2001 Conference Program

Thursday, February 15

7:30 - 8:45 am Registration & Breakfast

8:45 - 9:00 am Welcome

9:00 - 10:15 am General Session

Tricia Gerrodette, *Birds, Gardens, and the San Pedro River*

10:30 - 11:30 am Session I

A. Jan Groth, *Basic Desert Gardening A to Z**

B. Bill Fowler, *Native Seeds/SEARCH, Seed Collecting & Gardening*

C. John Miller, Ft. Huachuca Forester, & Cheri Melton, *Landscape Mistakes*

11:30 - 11:45 pm Exhibits

11:45 - 1:15 pm Lunch, Door Prizes & Exhibits

1:30 - 2:45 pm General Session

Sandy Anderson, *Critters in the Garden, Snakes in the Squash, Birds in the Beans . . .*

3:00 - 4:00 pm Session II

A. Angel Rutherford, *Houseplant Basics**

B. Jason Jomilonis, Executive Chef, Westward Look Resort, Tucson, *Gardening & Cooking with Herbs*

C. Jane Livingston, *Let's Talk Trash*

4:15 - 5:15 pm Session III

A. Sherri Wooldridge, *Basic Flower Arranging**

B. Kazz Workizer, *Wildlife Habitat Gardening*

C. Rob Call, *Pest Control in Fruit Trees*

*Denotes Basic Gardening Session

NOTE: ALL SPEAKERS, TOPICS, AND TIMES SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT NOTICE

Friday, February 16

7:30 - 8:45 am Registration & Breakfast

8:45 - 9:00 am Welcome

9:00 - 10:15 am General Session

Cecile Lumer, Ph.D., Research Associate, Missouri Botanical Garden, *Garden Pollinators*

10:30 - 11:30 am Session IV

A. Cheri Melton, *Soil Probes, Xeriscape Zones, & Plants, OH MY!**

B. Jim Koweek, *Native Grasses for Revegetation*

C. John White, Extension Agent, Dona Ana County, NM, *Drip Irrigation in Landscapes*

11:30 - 11:45 pm Exhibits

11:45 - 1:15 pm Lunch, Door Prizes & Exhibits

1:30 - 2:45 pm General Session

Ronnie Sidner, Ph.D. Bat Biologist, Tucson, AZ, *Bats in Your Garden*

3:00 - 4:00 pm Session V

A. Chris Jones, Extension Agent, Gila County, *Basic Tree Care**

B. Eric Clark, Civano Nursery, Tucson, *Landscaping With Native Plants*

C. Cado Daily, Water Wise Educator, *Water Harvesting, Swales, & Basics*

4:15 - 5:15 pm Session VI

A. Payton Charnack, *Organic Gardening**

B. Tom DeGomez, Ph.D., Extension Agent, Coconino County, *Pests of Native & Exotic Plants*

C. Peter Gierlach, *Just Glad to be Here: Stories and Songs from the Banks of the Ol' Guajolote*

5:30 - 7:00 pm Reception

Saturday, February 17

Optional tours

Garden Tip # 7563

It won't be long before it will be time once again to begin planning our summer vegetable gardens. One of the first plants that comes to mind for my summer garden is tomatoes. Although home-grown tomatoes are probably more expensive pound for pound than those you can buy in the supermarket, the taste of fresh tomatoes from your garden makes the extra cost worthwhile.

Last year I started my tomato plants in paper bags. Although I had read about that technique, I hadn't tried it until then, and I had such good luck I thought I would share it with you.

When tomato plants first appear in the garden shops it is much too early to set them out in the garden so you must put them in a sunny, protected place to harden them off. Last year I replanted young tomato plants directly from the plastic six-pack container into paper bags filled with garden soil and let them grow in the bags until it was time to put them in the garden. Then I planted the bags containing the young plants right in the garden. This not only provided a nice environment for the plants while they were growing up on my patio but allowed me to put them in the garden without disturbing the roots. In addition, I left about a half inch of the bag protruding out of the ground

to protect the tomatoes from cutworms.

I used regular paper "lunch" bags for my tomatoes and folded them down about an inch around the top to provide a little extra stability, and then I filled them with garden soil to within a couple inches of the top. The bags were placed on a sturdy tray for the duration of their stay on the patio—about a month—so I could transfer them to the garden easily. Although the bags became discolored from watering during this time, they only disintegrated after they had been in the ground for some time.

*Gary Gruenhagen, Master Gardener
gruenha@sinosa.com*

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