

# Our Most Precious Natural Resource

In October, the San Saba Bird & Nature Club will be focusing on native plants and grasses.

Even though San Saba has been blessed with an abundance of water, many surrounding towns have only enough water for necessities. Some have been forced to buy water from other sources. With the drought lingering on, it is a wake-up call to all of us to protect this precious resource.

In urban areas of Texas about 25 percent of the water supply is used for landscape and garden watering. Much of this water is used to maintain traditionally high water-demanding landscapes, or it is simply applied inefficiently. An adequate supply of high quality water has become a critical issue for the future prosperity of Texas. Booming populations have increased the demand on the state's already limited supply of high quality water.

In an attempt to reduce the excessive water use, the Texas Agricultural Extension Service is educating Texans in Xeriscape landscaping, quality landscaping that conserves water and protects the environment. The seven principles of Xeriscape landscaping are not new; they have been practiced in the landscape industry for decades.

Xeriscape landscapes need not be cactus and rock gardens. They can be green, cool landscapes full of beautiful plants maintained with water-efficient practices. The same green Texas-style landscape which we are accustomed to can be achieved and still conserve water.

Whether you are forced to conserve water or just feel compelled to do so, the following tips will help you in your decisions relating to the home landscape. The concept of combining all seven guidelines into one effort toward landscape water conservation is what makes Xeriscape landscaping unique. The principles are given below:

**Planning and design:** Creating a water-efficient landscape begins with a well-thought-out landscape design.

**Soil analysis:** To increase plant health and conserve water, add organic matter to the soil of shrub and flower bed areas. This increases the soil's ability to absorb and store water in a form available to the plant.

**Practical turf areas:** When considering a landscape's water requirement, it is important to note that turf grasses require more frequent watering and maintenance than most other landscape plants. Carefully select grass according to its intended use, planting location and maintenance requirements. Achieving a significant reduction in water consumption and landscape maintenance may also involve reducing the size of water-sensitive lawns through the use of patios, decks, shrub beds and groundcovers.

**Appropriate plant selection:** Select trees, shrubs and groundcovers based on their adaptability to your region's soil and climate. Native plants not only look pretty, they are the smart choice and will be able to survive even the dramatic climate swings in Texas.

**Efficient irrigation:** The goal of any irrigation system is to give plants a sufficient amount of water without waste. By zoning an irrigation system, grass areas can be watered separately and

more frequently than groundcovers, shrubs and trees. Both sprinkler and drip irrigation can be incorporated to achieve water conservation in the landscape.

**Use of mulches:** A good mulch conserves water by significantly reducing moisture evaporation from the soil. Mulch also reduces weed populations, prevents soil compaction and keeps soil temperatures more moderate which was a big factor this past summer.

**Appropriate maintenance:** Mowing grass at the proper height conserves water. Applying fertilizer to the lawn at the proper time and in the proper amount can save time, effort and money through reduced mowing and watering.

For each person in Texas, water must always be a vital concern. Water is a limited and fragile resource. The water used to irrigate landscapes is considered a luxury use of water by many people. Nonessential use of water implies a special responsibility to efficiently use the resource and to protect its quality. By incorporating these seven principles, you can help preserve our most precious natural resource-water.