

INTERIORS

Use fall season to plan annual lawn and garden program

Benjamin Franklin said, "When the well's dry, we know the worth of water." With today's emphasis on conservation, we're more concerned than ever before with effectively managing our water resources.

But that doesn't mean you need to turn your backyard into a desert, advises the Garden Council, a national organization of lawn and garden industry firms. That's not what water-saving landscape design and management is about. The approach, known as Xeriscaping from the Greek word for "dry",

actually relies on working with nature.

The "naturescaping" involves selecting the best plants, soils, locations, and irrigation systems to create a beautiful landscape that uses water efficiently.

So relax, you're not limited to cacti and rock gardens. Color-rich perennials and many varieties of shrubs are just two "naturescape" components that cut water use by almost two-thirds.

Specialists in water-saving landscape design suggest that property owners follow these guidelines to

improve both their conversation and beautification efforts:

Plan how you're going to use the various sections of your yard, and decide where you think the plantings would look and grow best.

Organize plants by putting them in groups according to level of water use - low, medium, or high. This saves the water that's lost when drought-tolerant plants are planted too close to thirsty tropicals.

Install an efficient drip watering system. Initial costs may seem high, but over time you'll realize the savings associated with a system that will bring water to the areas that need it rather than over-watering the entire property.

Accept the fact that any grass needs up to four times as much water every year as low-water-use groundcovers. Then select the locations where you need it, such as a play area or portion of the front yard.

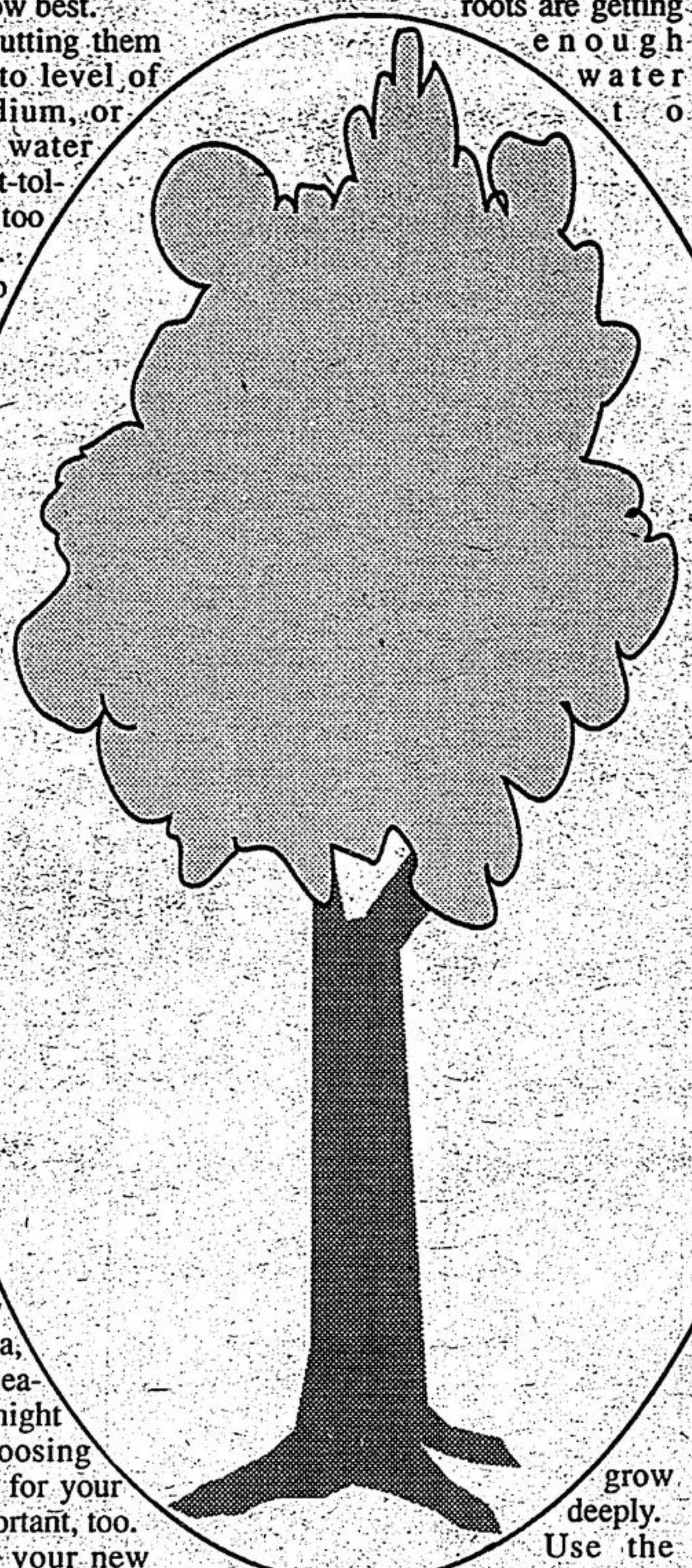
But choose the right grass for each: A warm-weather, drought-tolerant variety may do for the play area, while a section of cool-season, deep-green grass might suit the front yard. Choosing the proper grass species for your particular climate is important, too.

Learn proper care of your new water-efficient landscape to prevent watering infrequently and deeply because this encourages roots to grow deeper into the earth and draw moisture from the water table. These plants only need monthly

watering.

Check to see if the soil is moist or dry by inserting into the ground a rod or tool such as a screwdriver.

This will tell you whether or not the roots are getting enough water.



other devices such as soaker hoses, low-volume sprinkler heads, and automated systems run by time clocks.

Use a rod inserted in the ground to deliver water closer to the roots. This will conserve water and prevent evaporation.

Collect water during rainfalls and use it on the areas that need the most moisture.

Apply mulch to help limit evaporation and guard against erosion.

Apply water to establish drought-resistant plants only when they've become dry. That's important to the health of the plants.

With this in mind, apply mulch lightly in sections of the landscape that retain water due to dips in the land surface. In such areas, keep roots from rotting by not using mulch around the plant base, or by using a very porous mulching material.

Prepare the soil by adding amendments such as organic material. Compacted or layered soil won't allow water to filter properly, and that can cause an assortment of problems. Loamy soil mixed with organic matter is an excellent combination. For flower beds and shrubs, mix to a minimum depth of four inches into the soil.

Use plants native to the environment or plants that come from like environments and weather conditions.

In their home setting they need less water, fertilizer, pruning, and controlling pests will keep water needs at a minimum.

Mow lawns to three inches at the highest setting on the lawn mower. That keeps the water requirement low because the lawn will provide shade for the ground, which slows the rate of evaporation. Watering early in the morning will accomplish the same result.

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