

Xeriscaping defies drought

Beth Burwinkel

The well at Loveland Castle doesn't produce a lot of water, so it is important that the plants in the landscape aren't too thirsty. Container plantings get extra water once a week, but most of the outdoor landscaping exists on the precipitation nature provides.

"The stuff outside has to fend for itself," says Joe Carey, head "knight" at Loveland Castle, a 17-room Norman-esque-style castle begun in 1929 by Harry D. Andrews. The castle and its gardens, an Ohio historical site open for tours, was built by Andrews over 50 years.

Carey follows a technique called xeriscaping, a gardening style that requires little water and is popular in regions where water usually is scarce.

At Loveland Castle, drought-tolerant plants grow in several terraced rows on a hillside beside the castle. The terraces slow the rainwater so that the plants can absorb it as it washes down the hill. Some of the plants growing on the terraced beds include butterfly bush, baptisia, junipers, sedums, purple coneflowers, shrub roses, black-eyed Susan, Shasta daisies, hardy hibiscus, passion flower vine and peonies.

Near the top of the hill is a prairie garden with a variety of native plants.

The landscape at Loveland Castle is organic, Carey says, because they don't want landscaping chemicals to run into the nearby Little Miami River.

Several years ago, Marvin Duren of Marvin's Organic Gardens in Lebanon began working with the Loveland Castle staff.

Wes Duren, landscape manager at Marvin's Organic Gardens, says xeriscaping (pronounced zero-scaping) produces attractive landscapes in sunny or shady spots.

"You can have a xeriscape garden that has year-round interest," he says.

When creating a landscape with xeriscaping, it is important to choose drought-tolerant plants. Many native plants are drought-tolerant because they've adjusted to our climate, Duren says. Nevertheless, all new plants need water until they become established.

Duren builds new planting beds with compost, what he calls the "key to any xeriscape garden."

He starts with a 12- to 18-inch base of compost, which creates a slightly raised bed. He puts in drought-tolerant plants and covers the surface of the bed with 10 layers of newspaper. The newspaper chokes out weeds. Then he mulches the bed to keep the moisture inside. Mulches can reduce the need for watering by up to 80 percent, Duren says.

"We're always trying to use gardening techniques that use as little water as possible," he says.

If clients want irrigation, he recommends drip-line irrigation woven through the beds before mulching. The hose can be staked to the ground so it doesn't pop through the mulch. The drip-line helps deposit water where needed until the plants become established.

Duren recommends using organic fertilizers in a xeriscape landscape; chemical fertilizers contain salts that can wick moisture away from plants in a drought.

Part of the xeriscaping technique is to grade beds so water is channeled effectively, like the terraces at Loveland Castle, Duren says.

(side bar) 7 principles of xeriscape

Design. Consider water conservation in the planning phase of your landscape. The spot where people spend more time might require the most water. Plan for areas to harvest runoff water from roofs and paving to supplement irrigation.



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Irrigation. In-ground irrigation should be zoned for use in low-, moderate- and higher-use landscape areas. Drip, bubbler and micro-spray systems or soaker hoses apply water more efficiently than sprinkler systems.

Mulch. Permeable fabric barriers and porous mulches such as bark and gravel limit weed growth, reduce evaporation and control soil temperature and erosion.

Soil preparation. It's important to loosen compacted soil in all water-use zones; soil testing can determine which plants are best adapted to the site. In higher water-use zones, adding compost increases the soil's capacity to hold moisture.

Appropriate use of turf. Grass has a place in a xeri-scape. Turf provides a play surface, helps cool the environment and reduces erosion. Define your needs, choose the best grasses for your climate and limit planting to useful spaces.

Low-water-use plants. There are colorful, fragrant and beautiful plants to grow in less-irrigated landscapes. They depend on extensive root systems to gather water for proper growth and offer interest in all seasons.

Maintenance. Design will determine landscape maintenance, but any garden needs occasional weeding and pest management, pruning and irrigation system upkeep.



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