

# Dryscape Landscaping Offers Challenges, Rewards

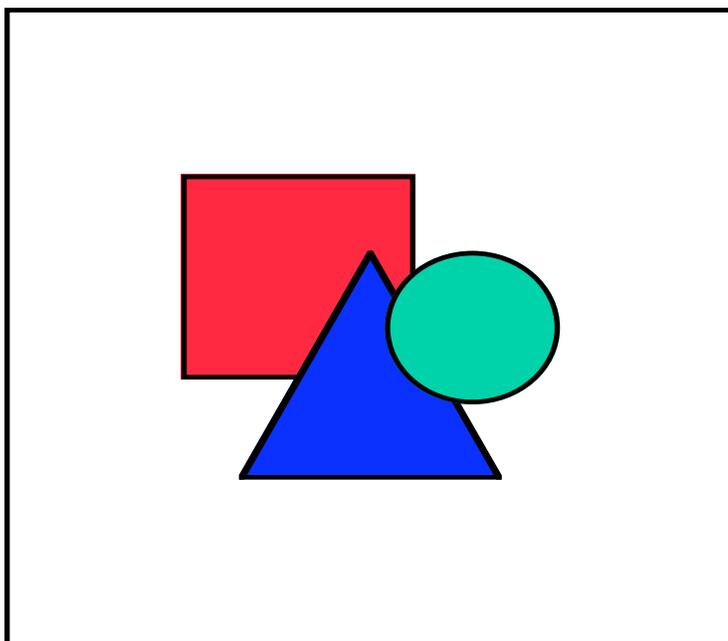
By Nancy Eastman

In reading the article by Cris Call in the fall issue of *WaterWise*, I was amused and delighted that someone else's experience with "low-maintenance" Xeriscape has been mine as well. When I bought my house in Lakewood in 1996, it had some remarkable outdoor deficiencies. The landscape primarily consisted of a vast amount of Kentucky bluegrass, with one large lump of a juniper, sheared to resemble a loaf of green bread, crammed up against the front of the house.

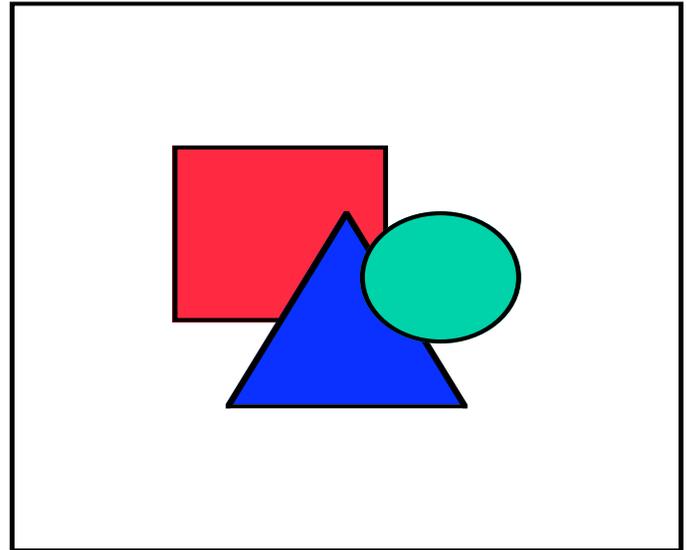
Eager to bring some color and texture to this sea of grass, I immediately started adding trees, shrubs, berms, and a good-sized rock garden. I found that creating a water-conserving landscape using less turf does not happen easily without an overall master plan. For someone who knew nothing about horticulture, but knew design and what seemed to look right, grouping plants according to their real water needs was difficult.

Reading dryscape landscape books, I began to appreciate what dry-land landscaping was about, and began experimenting in my own yard. More of my perfect Kentucky bluegrass disappeared, to be replaced by sage. Sand cherries, sumac and other shrubs. I began to have a yard of year-round color and texture.

Now, five years later, my landscape functions as a whole, with stable, self-sustaining patterns of organization and structure. I have practical turf areas that I can mow by hand. Installing new plants now takes on a certain purpose, making selections based on an overall idea of using water carefully and the possibilities of year-round texture and color. I feel more in balance with my Colorado environment and resources.



**Mulch is a must in Xeriscape.**



**Rock garden and golden retriever greet guests.**

Achieving that balance takes a lot of forethought. Having an overall master plan that can be implemented over several seasons is a tremendous help. It allows for a sensible establishment of priorities, such as planting trees first so they can be growing bigger while the rest of the landscape is installed. And it saves you from having to redo a previous year's effort that didn't work out.

As my landscape developed, details of maintenance came to be important. I was amazed at how much mulch I needed, and how the wind can carry it off. I was also amazed (I still am) at the commitment and effort it takes to renovate one's yard into a landscape. Most of my free time, not to mention my money, went into my new landscape.

With dry-land designs, weeding is a constant maintenance issue. The first year or so of my new landscape was a nightmare of bindweed, thistle and other invasive weeds. But effective mulching helped to discourage weeds, and as the landscape matured, weeding becomes less and less time-consuming. Still, the idea that well-planned low-water landscape requires less maintenance than a traditional Kentucky bluegrass lawn is an illusion. If you love to garden, you can consider time spent in your yard as therapy or quality time. If you regard landscape maintenance as an onerous chore, you're in trouble.

To me, maintaining a dryscape is more appealing than the chores of conventional lawn and garden maintenance. It's more natural and less forced. And crumbling a handful of soil keeps me centered and gives me a deepening appreciation of my prairie environment.