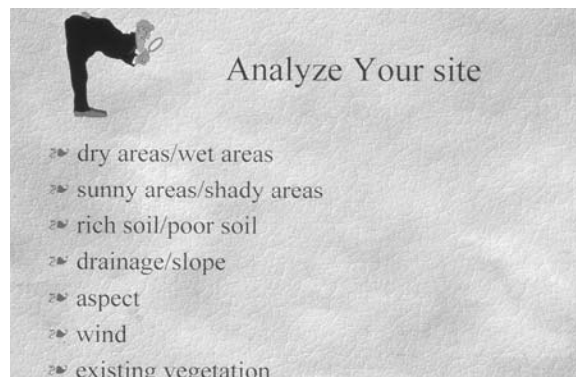
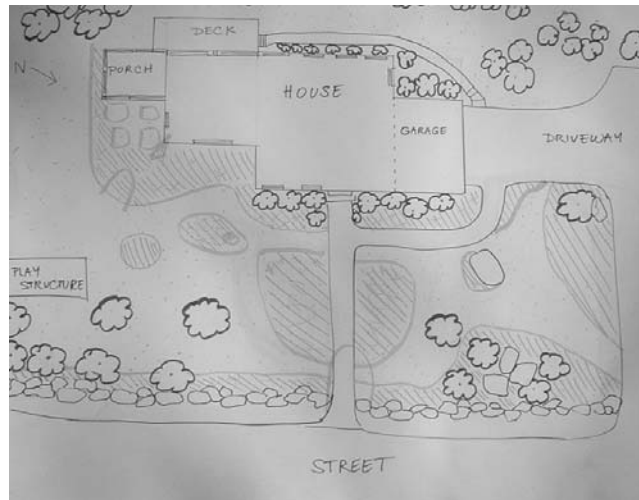


The Acton Garden Club has supported Waterwise Gardening education in partnership with the Acton Water District with a series of annual programs since 1999.



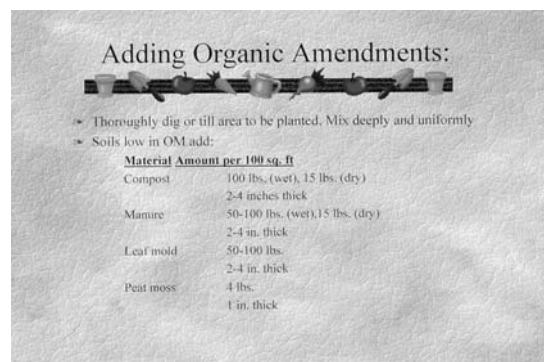
How can we utilize drought tolerant plants in our landscapes? By striving to achieve the goal of reducing our lawn area by 50%, as described by Marie Stella in her recent talk to our club, "The Sustainable Landscape: Gardening for the 21st Century – An Environmental Approach". We can begin by analyzing our site. Choose the "Right Plant for the Right Place". The goal is to group plants with similar needs together: sun, shade, water.



Let's step through the process of **reducing your lawn area** in this front yard example:

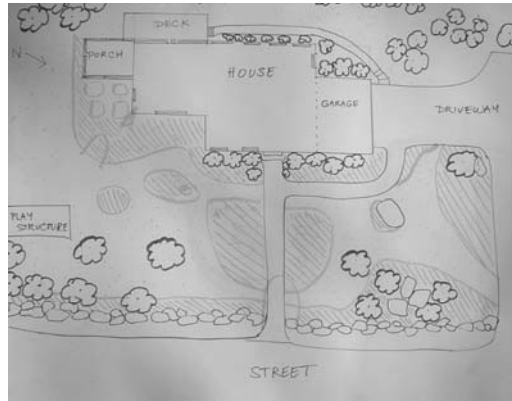
Create drought tolerant beds to: provide views from your interior to look out upon; border driveways, walkways, foundation, walls, existing shrubs and trees; restructure your lawn to be a series of grass pathways, considering paths that your family takes when crossing the lawn; reconfigure poor lawn areas.

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- Once you decide to create a new drought tolerant planting bed, think about soil amendments. Due to home construction, most of us have poor soil: "fill" with a few inches of top soil that was put down when the lawn was planted. We want to **amend the soil to be water retaining**. How?
- Soil test** – adjust pH if low – chemical processes that release nutrients can be bound up at a lower pH. Unless you are growing acid tolerant plants, you want to raise the pH to about 6.5.
- Add organic matter** – See recommended rates of application

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Each fall and spring, target a new area to create into a bed. Outline the bed with a garden hose – curves are appealing. Remove the turf, thoroughly work the amendments into the soil. An alternative to the traditional method of removing turf and tilling in soil amendments is called the “no-till method”. Turf is composted in place by covering with sheets of newspaper. The bed is prepared by spreading the recommended amendments on top of the newspaper, 6 to 12 inches high.

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We're planting a bed with an ornamental grass in this slide. Lay down layers of newspapers, wet them with a hose to keep them from flying away, and layer soil amendments on top. You can plant directly into the compost in the spring. Create this bed in fall, and you can plant first thing in the spring.

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Here is the finished bed topped with mulch. You may use the newspaper and mulch combination on purely mulched areas, such as in front of rock wall along a street and along a driveway, to keep weeds out. The advantage to “no-till” is a savings in time, labor and weeding, if you relay newspaper and mulch over the surface of your planted and mulched areas each spring. There are two good books on the no-till approach to planting beds:

Lasagna Gardening by Patricia Lanza

Weedless Gardening by Lee Reich

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Maintenance Tips

- **Fall:** good time for planting, lime if necessary, dig and amend new areas, remove diseased plants, begin composting leaves, check for grubs, topdress w/compost, ground seaweed, aerate turf areas
- **Winter:** mulch after soil freezes, save wood ashes
- **Spring:** when soil dries dig in compost, add nutrients/mulch as necessary, sidedress w/compost, aerate turf areas
- **Summer:** replenish mulch as needed, pull weeds before they seed

Maintaining your drought resistant plantings requires that you periodically add organic matter to the soil and mulch each growing season. There are two organic amendments mentioned here: seaweed and wood ash. Seaweed supplies a high percentage of potassium and micronutrients; wood ash provides potassium and higher amounts of phosphorus and also raises pH.

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Acton Residents have done it!

Rain barrels!



Watering Considerations:

- Capture rainwater from your roof for hand watering. The Water District advertises a reduced price rain barrel in the spring
- Honor the town's water restrictions from May – October
- Sprinkling is the least efficient way to deliver water, due to evaporation
- Micro irrigation systems are the most efficient . Lee Valley Tools has good information about drip irrigation and products on their website at www.leevalley.com

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The goal is to minimize water use.

Initially, you need to water in your plantings and keep them well watered as they get established. Once established, water only when they need it.

Monitor rainfall with a rain gauge.

One inch per week is adequate.

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The Yucca plant has succulent, swordlike leaves which store water for drought periods. The leaves also have a silvery tinge to them.

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Liatris, Gayfeather, has tuberous roots or corms. Eryngium, Sea Holly, has divided leaves.

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Drought Tolerant Plants

Using Drought Tolerant Plants in Our Gardens



Ornamental grasses have very deep tap roots to seek water during droughts. Zebra, shown here, is clumping and is a striking accent to the garden.

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Drought Tolerant Plants

Using Drought Tolerant Plants in Our Gardens



Amsonia is a nice accent in the garden with its blue flowers. The leaves are long and narrow.

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Echinacea, Purple Coneflower, has fibrous roots to store water for periods of drought. The stems and leaves also have small hairs, which protect against drying from winds and capture rain.

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This garden has both ornamental grasses, which we have discussed, as well as Geranium, Cranesbill. The leaves are divided into 5-7 deeply cut parts. Again, they have small hairs.

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Coreopsis, Tickseed, has leaves that are very thin and long.

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Cimicifuga is a native wildflower. It has 3 coarsely toothed leaflets.

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Acton Residents have done it!
Drought tolerant butterfly garden



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Acton Residents have done it!
Water District Drought tolerant garden: no water



Kniphofia, Torch Lily or Red Hot Poker, is very drought tolerant and the plant has fleshy roots to store water. The leaves are long and sword shaped.

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Achillea, Yarrow, has fernlike foliage. The divided leaves help the plant to not lose moisture. The leaves are also aromatic when crushed.

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Preserve open fields; there is no returning once we have built a community of homes on them.

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Meadows

Using Drought Tolerant Plants in Our Gardens



Making wildflowers a part of our garden keeps natural habitat alive for insects, birds and animals.

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Meadows

Using Drought Tolerant Plants in Our Gardens



Appreciate wild grasses; it is less work, requires no watering and preserves open space.

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Acton residence: garden of wildflowers seeded in 1994. Garden rooms created by paths throughout the property. Easy maintenance plantings, perennial daylilies.

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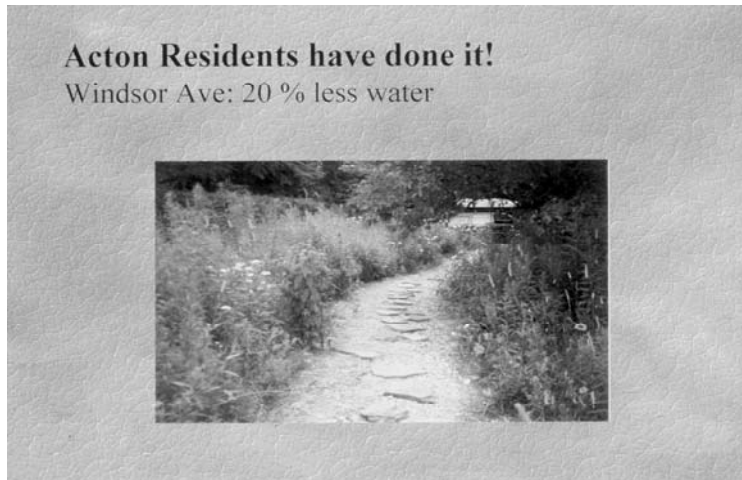


AGC member: new spring planted wildflower meadow in the woods.

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Each season brings out a different set of flowers in bloom; summer: rudbeckia, cosmos and squash.



Acton Resident: Wildflower walkway to the house.
Maintenance and water use are greatly reduced.

Conclusion

Using Drought Tolerant Plants in Our Gardens



You can enjoy the beauty, ease of maintenance and water conservation of a drought tolerant planting. Use our tips to get started today!

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