



# **DIRT WORK**

## **Potter County Gardening Newsletter**



February 2016



**Austin Voyles**

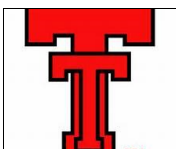
**CEA-AG/NR**

**P: 806-373-0713**

**F: 806-373-7946**

**C: 806-632-5258**

**E: [austin.voyles@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:austin.voyles@ag.tamu.edu)**



Thank you for picking up the FIRST EVER “DIRT WORK”, the newest Potter County gardening newsletter! My name is Austin Voyles, and I have recently assumed the role of Extension Agent for Agriculture and Natural Resources in Potter County!

### **WHAT IS THE JOB OF THE COUNTY AGENT?**

This is a question that I get asked on a regular basis from common stake holders, home owners, producers, and 4-H Families. I hope this quick outline will help everyone understand!

- As the Ag/NR agent, one of my responsibilities is to help convey information to agriculture producers throughout the county. We as an organization pride ourselves on conveying timely, relevant, research-based information to help our producers in our counties become more profitable and better land stewards.
- I also have a heavy responsibility to provide the same type of information to small acreage land owners and urban home owners throughout the county as the need arises.
- I have asked and been granted 4-H Livestock responsibilities in Potter county. This will take place in the form of teaching young livestock exhibitors all about their 4-H livestock project from facility preparation and feeding, to evaluation and showmanship.

I list these 3 main areas and I hope that everyone quickly understands that this is just a glimpse into the day to day activities that I take part in. We have a great team here in Potter County, and we all work together to ensure that we have a successful program full of enriching experiences.

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*The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating*

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## **WHAT TO DO DURING THE WINTER??????**

We get calls to the office ALL THE TIME from avid up-and-coming gardeners that want to do SOMETHING during the winter! I always let them know that the winter time is a great time to amend soil and weed gardens, but MOST IMPORTANTLY do some PLANNING! I hope the below articles help with that!



## **WHAT IS XERISCAPE**

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 addition, seasonal fluctuations in rainfall and periodic droughts create a feast-to-famine cycle in Texas. In urban areas, about 25 percent of the water supply is used to water landscapes and gardens. In the summer, as much as 60 percent of the water the average household uses may be for landscape maintenance. Many traditional landscapes require large amounts of water, and much of this water is applied inefficiently. To reduce the excessive use of water for maintaining landscapes, the Texas Agricultural Extension Service encourages Texans to adopt Xeriscape landscaping. This concept conserves water and protects the environment. Xeriscape landscapes need not be cactus and rock gardens. They can be cool, green landscapes full of beautiful plants maintained with water-efficient practices. The seven water-saving principles of Xeriscape landscaping are not new; they have been practiced in the landscape industry for decades. Combining all seven into a comprehensive program of landscape water conservation is what makes Xeriscape landscaping unique.



### **The principles are:**

- Planning and design
- Soil analysis and preparation
- Practical turf areas
- Appropriate plant selection
- Efficient irrigation
- Use of mulches
- Appropriate maintenance



By incorporating these seven principles, you can help preserve our most precious natural resource—water.

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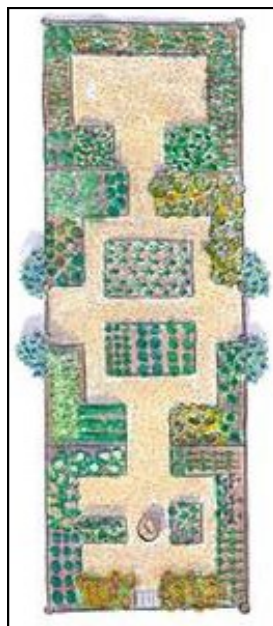
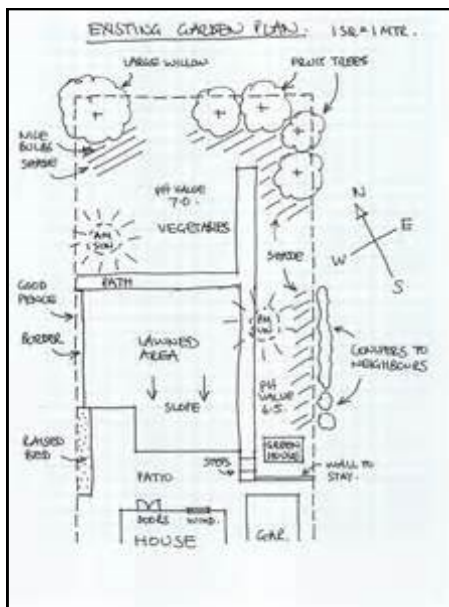
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### **PLANNING AND DESIGN**

Planning and design is the most important starting point for any water efficient landscape!!

Sketch your yard, showing the locations of buildings, trees, shrubs, gardens and grass areas. Then consider how you use the various areas of your yard, how you want your yard to look, the amount of maintenance you plan to give it, and the budget you can afford. Also pinpoint the areas of your landscape that require the most water. The purpose of planning is to design a landscape that will have the appearance and function you desire while conserving water. Local landscape architects, designers, nurserymen and county Extension agents can help in this decision making. You can implement your landscape design gradually over several years.

**THESE PLANS CAN BE EXTENSIVE or SIMPLE!!!!**



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## **SOIL ANALYSIS AND PREPARATION**

Once a week we receive calls from homeowners and/or gardeners that have experienced a series of unsuccessful outings with yards or gardens! When this is the case, the first thing I ask is “Have you pulled soil samples and analyzed them?” Guess what the answer ALWAYS IS.....”NO!”

You can't fix what is wrong until you know why its wrong! We live in the Panhandle! The soil varies EVERYWHERE! Get a sample and get it analyzed so we can help make you successful!!!!

## **HOW TO COLLECT A SOIL SAMPLE**

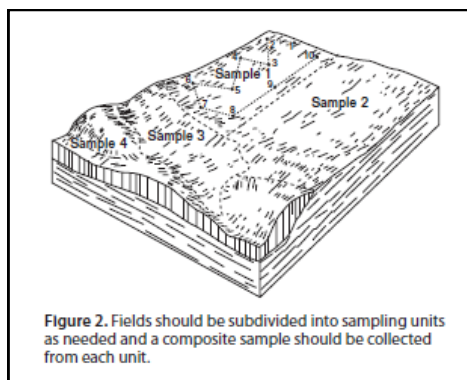


Figure 2. Fields should be subdivided into sampling units as needed and a composite sample should be collected from each unit.

Divide your landscape up into workable and practical areas. If you are going to be changing the plant type or gardening practice in one area, you should have a sample for that specific area



You can then send your sample to the AgriLife Soil Testing laboratory OR utilize a local testing laboratory such as Servi-Tech.

Typically, a “routine” test is all that your application will require!

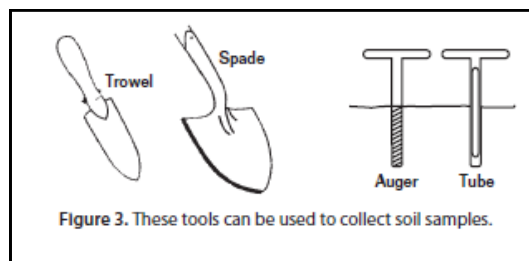


Figure 3. These tools can be used to collect soil samples.

Use a sharp and CLEAN gardening tool, auger or core sample tube to collect your sample. TYPICALLY samples are collected to 6” below the surface



Thoroughly MIX all samples from each DIVIDED REGION to obtain a homogeneous mixture for analyzing. Place samples from each area in a clearly marked sample bag or sealed container