

By Kate Parham

YOU FOUND THE perfect house, you've decorated it to a T and then—then you look at the yard. It's dying. It hasn't rained in weeks and you can't afford to keep the sprinklers on all day. What now? Fortunately, there are options, from specially developed lawn seed to drought-tolerant plants, that are perfect for those who live in dry, arid areas but still want a beautiful, green yard.

What does "drought-tolerant" mean?

Simply put, grasses and plants that are drought-tolerant, also referred to as drought-resistant or water-wise, "can endure condi-

tions everywhere are becoming unpredictable and erratic with global climate change," says Ogden. "Potable water is in short supply, even in areas with abundant rainfall; therefore, minimizing additional landscape irrigation makes sense [in multiple places]."

While Miracle-Gro provides several drought-tolerant products, including water-soluble lawn fertilizer and drought-tolerant grass seed, there are also a number of drought-tolerant plants. "In our book, we feature 200 varieties with plant choices adapted to all climate regions, and also give mention to an additional 400 related plants," says Ogden,

local resources, such as the county extension office or landscape professionals. "In Austin, [Texas], the city sponsors the Grow Green program, which has a very informative website and publishes free materials on all facets of landscape design, installation, maintenance and problem solving," says Plotner, who notes other cities have similar programs.

If you want a drought-resistant lawn, Kiekenapp has a plan, though it varies based on whether you're planting a new lawn or overseeding an existing lawn. If your lawn is new, follow these easy steps:

1. Prepare the ground with a roto tiller, loosening soil and adding topsoil if the ground is very rocky.

2. Plant drought-tolerant seeds and keep them moist until germination with a sprinkler system or a thin layer of mulch or organic material. This usually takes about 10 to 14 days.

3. After germination, the grass will sprout. Keep it watered with a regular schedule, and in six to eight weeks you can mow for the first time.

Follow a similar program with an existing lawn. Simply mow the lawn short, about half an inch high. Apply drought-tolerant grass seeds, taking care to keep them moist through germination. Mow as needed. *Voila!* A healthy, thriving lawn. ☑

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Water-wise planting

Creating a drought-resistant paradise

tions in which there is no rainfall over a protracted period of time," says Holly Plotner, a Travis County, Texas, Master Gardener.

In more specific terms, it refers to plants that "will remain healthy and attractive with just 1 inch of water every two weeks during the active growing season," says Scott Ogden, principal at Plant Driven Design (www.plantdrivendesign.com) and co-author (with his wife, Lauren Springer Ogden) of the book *Waterwise Plants for Sustainable Gardens* (Timber Press, 2011).

What does this mean for you? It means that you can have a healthy, sustainable garden that will thrive with less work and water, even if you don't live in a plant-friendly climate.

Do you have the right climate?

"We have created three different types of drought-tolerant seed based on the different climates found in the U.S.," explains Herb Kiekenapp, national account manager at The Scotts Miracle-Gro Company. Kiekenapp says Scotts broke down the United States horizontally into three separate climates—top, middle and bottom third—with corresponding products for each (see "The Costco Connection" at right).

All of these products have a water-absorbent coating, a fertilizer and a fungicide to help them thrive in drought conditions.

However, the middle third of this country is not necessarily the only region that requires drought-tolerant gardening. "Most climates experience drought at some point, and weather pat-

terns everywhere are becoming unpredictable and erratic with global climate change," says Ogden. "Potable water is in short supply, even in areas with abundant rainfall; therefore, minimizing additional landscape irrigation makes sense [in multiple places]."

Getting started

Start by making a list of drought-resistant plants adapted to your climate that appeal to you, suggests Ogden. "Then figure out where these best fit on your site and how they can be placed attractively in the garden." It's important to consider the plants' unique attributes so that you can create attractive combinations to extend interest through the season. If you have questions, Plotner suggests contacting

The Costco Connection

This spring, Costco will be carrying Scotts Water Smart Plus grass seed—Sun & Shade Mix, Tall Fescue Mix and Bermuda grass—for each of the three appropriate climates. Costco also carries composters, as compost mulch helps with water retention as well as feeding soil.

