

Let's Talk Gardening

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Xeriscape IV (reprint from 2002)

Planning

Turf

Irrigating

Soil

Mulch

Plants

Maintenance

The last item on the xeriscape list is **maintenance**. This one includes weeding, fertilization, mowing, disease control, insect control, and checking the irrigation system. Maintenance is the item that most people, for whatever reason, don't plan for. I guess they think that once the plants are in the ground, that's it. If they survive, that's OK. If they don't, we'll just replant them next year. No big deal.

Weeding is a job that most gardeners hate to do, but it has to be done or the weeds "win." A weed is defined as "any plant you don't want growing right there." We just don't like to pull up a growing plant, even if it IS in the way. Poor baby. Hey! If there's something growing where you don't want it, get rid of it. Life's too short to be unhappy over something like that. Weeding is something that has to be done constantly. If you'll do a little each week, the weeds won't get ahead of you. It's best to pull them up if you can. If you can't, use a weeding fork to clip off the root or, as a last resort, use chemicals to kill them. Vinegar is a pretty good organic weed killer. There's a 20 percent vinegar available that'll kill weeds quickly and effectively. It's a little expensive, but better than chemicals.

We've talked about fertilizing in previous articles. Suffice it to say, all living plants need nutrients all the time—just like we do. They need food, air, and water all the time. If any one of these is lacking, the plant will suffer. That's one reason I use slow-release fertilizers—they last a long time and the plant gets nutrients each time I water.

We've already talked about mowing, too. Always keep the mower blade sharp—the grass will appreciate it. However, mowing isn't any big deal for those of us who don't irrigate the grass. Once around with the string trimmer just about does it for me. I'm letting the Bermuda grass go to seed in an effort to thicken it up.

Disease control is dependent upon the disease. Mostly, what we suffer from around are the fungal diseases. You really oughta keep a good systemic fungicide on hand. Ask your local supplier and be sure to follow the directions.

Insect control is an entire science by itself. Healthy plants have a built-in bug resistance. If you think you have bug problems, it's best to try to treat only that problem and not use a universal bug killer. Universals kill all the bugs—good and bad. Only about 2 percent of the bugs are bad ones. The other 98 percent helps keep the 2 percent in check.

We've talked about irrigation systems in the past, too. Be sure to check yours periodically to be sure that everything is still working OK and that you don't waste precious water. Sprinkler heads have a way of getting out of whack all by themselves. (If something works OK, does that mean that it's "in whack?" Hmm...)

Send your comments and/or questions to gardener@gvtc.com.