

## Plan now for next year's xeric yard

By CURTIS SWIFT

Special to the Sentinel

If you are interested in reducing your water bill next year, start planning now. By carefully choosing elements of your landscape and updating irrigation technology, you can be ahead of the water-saving game in the springtime.

### **Choosing grasses**

Your Kentucky bluegrass or tall fescue lawn requires a great deal of care. Watering, fertilizing, mowing and pest control are required to maintain these grasses and these all take a bite out of your time and budget.

You can replace your water-guzzling lawn with buffalo grass or Zoysia grass, which will reduce your water use by 50 to 75 percent. Less watering also means less mowing.

In order to select the correct grass for your yard, you need to know what type of soil you have. Buffalo grass does not tolerate white alkali but Zoysia grass grows very well in these salty soils. Two types of Zoysia grass, Zenith and Compadre, are the only two Zoysia grasses currently recommended for this area. Check them out for yourself at the turfgrass plots at the Mesa County Arboretum at the fairgrounds.

Once established, you will need to reset your irrigation clock or reduce watering to avoid overwatering these grasses. You also won't need as much fertilizer and will find that you don't need to mow these grasses as often.

### **Replacing lawn around shrubs and trees**

Do you really need all that lawn that currently surrounds your home or business? Get ready to replace some of your turf with mulch around trees and shrubs. Select areas that already have their own sprinkler systems and adjust the watering schedule accordingly. You should be able to reduce the amount of water being applied to your trees and shrubs by at least 25 percent. Some trees and shrubs require only half the water that you currently apply to your thirsty lawn.

#### Planting xeric plants

Serviceberry, blue mist spirea, ninebark, three-leaf sumac, dwarf Korean lilac and even common lilac are low water-requiring shrubs. Why not consider these plants when selecting new shrubs for your landscape? There also are many other low-water-requiring flowers and trees available. Many of these are planted at the Mesa County Arboretum. Take the time to check these out so you are ready to purchase and plant them next spring.

### **Updating irrigation technology**

Replacing your outdated irrigation controller with a "smart" controller such as the SmartLine WeatherMatic controller or the Hunter ET System will automatically adjust the watering schedule based on the needs of the turf (and trees, shrubs and flowers). The benefits of this technology can also be achieved by connecting a RainBird ET Manager to your current controller. Information on these controllers is available from the Colorado State University Extension office in Grand Junction (244-1836) or <http://WesternSlopeTurf.org>. For more information on how to renovate your existing landscape to save water, check out [www.thedripwebsite.com](http://www.thedripwebsite.com).

*We live in a semiarid climate where droughts will always be a part of our environment. Water for our future means conserving now. The Drought Response Information Project (DRIP) is a collaboration between the valley's domestic water*

*utilities and CSU Cooperative Extension to provide information and educate the public about drought and the importance of water conservation.*