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In a previous article I introduced you to Xeriscaping which is creating a landscape that uses less water or uses water more efficiently. In that article I discussed the first step in Xeriscaping - planning and design. Once you have your plan and design there are several other factors to consider.

The second step to making your landscape more water-efficient is a soil analysis. There are a wide variety of soils in Crawford County, ranging from deep sands to poorly-drained clays. Each soil has its own unique structure and texture, drainage pattern, pH, and nutrient content. Soils are seldom perfect, but most of them can be improved to ensure the best plant growth.

The first thing you should do is to take a soil sample from your landscape. Ornamental areas should be sampled as well as turf areas. The soil sample will help determine lime and fertilizer requirements, and can save you a lot of wasted time and money.

Improving the structure of poor soils can be accomplished in several ways. Poorly-drained soils can be improved with deep cultivation to break up the hardpan. Another option is to bring in additional soil to raise the planting area 12-15 inches above the existing grade. Finally, a coarse aggregate, such as granite sand can be incorporated to improve the soil structure. Soils that are well drained and tend to dry out more quickly need to have organic matter added. This can be accomplished with aged animal manure or compost. Commercial potting soils would work as well, but cost may be a limiting factor. This material should be added to the soil and incorporated. Do not add organic matter (compost) directly to the planting hole.

For years we have added organic matter, like peat moss or compost to the planting hole to enrich the soil. Recent research shows no benefit from amending the plant hole. In fact, organic matter added to individual planting holes in clay soils acts like a sponge, holding excess moisture around the plant roots. Waterlogged soils suffocate plant roots and are the leading cause of plant death in Georgia. Even in well drained soils, too much organic matter encourages the roots to stay in the planting hole instead of tapping into the native soils.