

A Quick and Easy Transition Into an Efficient Water-Wise Yard

When the Pioneers entered the Great Salt Lake valley for the first time, they were confronted with a mountain desert. There were no streets, no subdivisions and most of all, no easy access to water. They started from the beginning channeling and diverting water to their farms and homes. In spite of the huge task of organizing this work across the valley, they were able to make an effective system that included both the physical structure and a coordinated use schedule.

This transition from cold desert to functioning farm was not accomplished overnight; and neither does the transition from water guzzler yard to water wise yard. Shifting the entire yard can seem just as laborious as the pioneer's canal system but if broken down into manageable parts, it's doable. One of the great advancements today is that we have access to so many resources to help us in our pursuit and we at Thanksgiving Point are here to help as well when you're ready to make the switch to a beautiful and colorful landscape of your own.

In reality, any landscape transition needs time to be installed, settle, and become established. The transition in your yard may be a slow process, but it will be one that allows you to view and enjoy the change as your plants mature. And over time, you will better see where you want paths, flowers, and other items.

Equally important as plant choices are water-wise practices, such as mulching or mowing a lawn at a higher mower setting, something that can be done without replacing existing plantings. An added bonus to water-wise is that it can be a major wildlife attraction. We at Thanksgiving Point have so many hummingbirds in our water wise garden that they nearly fill the skies.

The shift we made here at Thanksgiving Point for our water-wise garden may have appeared immediate but it was a process over time. The first step included removing the current turf to make way for more functional use of the space. We removed diseased and dying trees. Next we added steel edging and crush flagstone gravel for pathways. Making the pathways permeable is another efficient use of rain and erosion control because the water can permeate directly back into the soil. We then designed specific beds of the available space to showcase the colorful display of water-wise plants available in Utah. We arranged them in groups and clusters in a drift pattern mimicking nature. The arrangement also induces wildlife to visit the area in search of food and protection. We finished the project with unique signage to explain and showcase the purpose and uses of the garden. The entire process for



Thanksgiving Point to transition from lawn to water-wise happened over approximately 5 years. Your transition may take time as well, although probably not as long as that at Thanksgiving Point.

Here are the basic steps for you to take in order of priority:

- ▶ Step 1: Start small and decide how much of your yard will be converted to water wise. The lawn only needs to be a functional space for play and animals. The rest of the yard could have other functions such as flower beds, pathways, storage, children's play area, etc.
- ▶ Step 2: Design your water wise space (more information provided HERE [insert link to blog 2]). The arrangement of the functional spaces can be unique to you and vary according to needs. Use your yard as an extension of the house with separate rooms or areas for certain functions. These could include entertainment, play, eating, reading, meditation, food production and many more.
- ▶ Step 3: Determine how you will remove existing plants, lawn, or edgings of beds (more information provided HERE [insert link to blog 2]). Arranging your yard for easy maintenance includes less weekend mowing, clean separation between beds and effective plant choice. And therefore would indicate less lawn, effective edging either submerged or more visible, and the right plant for the right place.
- ▶ Step 4: Lay out the basic area, or skeleton, of the space – shape with edging and objects to mimic how you imagine the new design for the bed. Get an idea of how the space will look in 3D. There are also a number of mobile apps that help you do this also.
- ▶ Step 5: Spread out over time the planting and installing of hardscape and mulch. Give yourself time to absorb the change and the process to get it done right and how you like it.

See suggestions at <https://cwel.usu.edu/turf>.

