

Rain, Erosion and Rock Gardens

You may ask how did we get from rain and erosion to rock gardens. It begins with a story.

Several years ago we had some heavy rains similar to recent ones and the soil on the downside slope that is west of my driveway slid into my neighbor's front yard. He had one of those decorative cobble designs and instead of draining the water off, the cobble ended up buried under the soil. I knew that we had to create a functioning drain off, but I had to do more with my landscape as well. We ended taking up three actions. We removed the cobble, dug a real drainage path dry stream following the erosion channels, and replaced the area with some smaller gravel and then we returned the cobble. Next I added a few shrubs: curry plant (great smell, yellow flowers, and gray foliage) and roundleaf vitex: some perennials such as columbines, rose campion, and a ground cover dwarf plumbago (red leaves in the fall, blue flowers). Lastly, where my driveway met the sidewalk, I built a rock garden.

What I wanted to do was to slow the water down and capture some for my landscaping before it hit the storm sewer system where it then belongs to Texas.

Getting the rocks was the first step in creating a rock garden. I was lucky to have access to some Sandia limestone and granite boulders. I placed them so they looked like they rolled down the mountain, grouped them in odd numbered groupings, and dug in at least a third of each rock. Digging in is easier than it sounds. Wet the soil, wait a day, and the soil becomes more like sand so you can dig in it and move the smaller boulders around so the best side faces the direction you want. I started farthest downhill and worked my way to the top (driveway). Then I added a red yucca and surrounded the boulders with plants such as Persian stone cress which blooms lavender in the spring, dianthus – a gray grassy plant with fuschia pink flowers, Goblin gaillardia, veronica (Turkish speedwell), wild marigold, tufted primrose, pussytoes, angelita daisy, and narrow leaf penstemon. I added chocolate flower which in retrospect was a mistake because it's taken over. Once the plants were placed and drip irrigation run, I tossed in various sizes of gravel as a mulch. The finished product looked like photo below which was taken that spring. I was happy and my neighbor was happy.



This is the way it looked in the fall of 2014. What can I say, it grew larger over time. And rabbits like to eat dianthus so it hasn't grown very much.



If your landscape has been affected by erosion, you'll need to slow down the flow of water. You can do this by digging in some straw bales where the water is overtopping the slope, leaving the top of the bale partially exposed like a cap, and creating small ponding areas that allow the water to rest a moment and infiltrate. I think of the ponding areas like the table fountains with cups that drip water into the next cup when the first cup is full. The water flows from pond to pond to pond. You can redirect the water by setting the location of the overflow (lowest point of the pond). The whole structure needs to be supported by various sizes of gravel with plants placed on the low side of any berm used to create ponds.

If your erosion problem comes from the canals, you can again slow the water down. You can use a rain chain, build a French drain where the water drops, or create a ponding area perfect for helping higher water use trees and shrubs.

Rain also brings more weeds. Any time you turn over the soil you expose more weed seeds and the water just speeds up the germination process. A few warm days and conditions are perfect. The best time to weed is after the storm settles - while the seedlings are still small.

But no one is complaining about the rain. It's been the wettest year since we moved to High Desert and I am very thankful.