



Rock Around the Yard

By Jan Cleere

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If you want to spend your summers lolling around the swimming pool instead of mowing grass and pulling weeds, put in a rock yard. Rock adds natural beauty, requires far less care than grass and reduces your water bill enough to afford filling that pool.

Before deciding what type of rock, including size and color, best suits your yard, visit several nurseries or rock companies for comparison. Find out what services they provide (design, measuring, delivery, spreading, cleanup) and get an estimate of charges. A landscaping business may undertake all aspects of rock yard creation, while a material supply company delivers the rock and you hire subcontractors for spreading.

Or you can do it all yourself.

Calculate the square footage of your yard. Some rock companies use cubic feet as a measuring tool while others calculate in cubic yards or tonnage but they all provide conversion charts or will refigure from your measurements. On average, 150 to 200 square feet of rock covers one cubic yard at 1 1/2 to 2-inches of depth. Price depends upon the size and color of rock selected but averages \$26.00 to \$35.00 per cubic yard. Let your house determine rock color choice. If you have a red brick border or red tile roof, an earth tone such as Sonoran Tan, Apache Brown or Sunset presents a soft contrast and more natural appearance. For more dramatic results, try the red-hued Desert Rose, Mission Red or Coral Pink. While companies assign different names for the same rock, most will give you samples for comparison. Keep in mind that light colors like pale grays add a reflective glare.

Most landscaping rock is granite of varying types and sizes acquired throughout the state. Sedona rock has a definite reddish tint while granite brought in from Casa Grande or Catalina leans toward brownish/gold shades. Color preferences vary from year to year with earth tones now the most popular color choices. (If you remember when yards were glued down with white rock or painted green, you are as old as I am.)

Rocks come in sizes from small decomposed granite to large river rock and boulders. One-half to 3/4-inch screened rocks are best suited for yard landscaping. Screening eliminates fine particles that encourage weed growth. Three-quarter-inch rock is difficult to walk on but has a more rugged look than the finer 1/2-inch. Uniformity of rock size presents a formal appearance while unscreened smaller stones lean toward a natural look.

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Years ago, heavy black plastic was laid to prevent weeds from sprouting in desert landscaping. We now know this deprives plants of oxygen. If a barrier is necessary in a particularly weed-prone area, some of the woven materials on the market today help deter sprouting weeds. A weed deterrent spray, or pre-emergent, keeps weeds at bay for several months. Spray a few days before delivery of your rock so the pre-emergent can penetrate into the soil. Place cardboard or plywood at the base of existing plants to prevent poisoning. Spraying does not mean weeds are gone forever. You will still have to get down on all fours and pull those nasty critters that spring up after a summer rain. Periodic spraying of a pre-emergent keeps most weeds under control.

After your rocks are delivered and you have decided to spread them yourself, use every means possible to convince your friends and neighbors to help. I have even resorted to bribing a group of neighborhood children with use of my swimming pool for the day and all the hot dogs they could eat to wheelbarrow rocks into my backyard. It's a backbreaking chore if done alone.

Consider using more than one type of rock in your yard. A rivulet of river rock adds diversity, or maybe flagstones or a boulder for focal points. Whatever accents you choose, keep the majority of your yard covered with smaller rock for cost efficiency and ease of maintenance.

Initially, a rock yard may seem like an expensive addition to your home compared to growing grass, but with the savings in water usage and maintenance, your time is better spent splashing around in that pool.