



Dry Creek Bed: A River Runs Through It

by Ken Vaughn, Master Gardener

Would you like a little less yard work? Want to have less yard waste, save some of our precious water, and provide a way to drain excess water when it rains?

Then you may want to consider putting in your own dry creek bed. Decorative creeks are becoming more popular as we are thinking of different ways to save water in our hot valley landscaping. Done correctly, they are very attractive, save yard work, and give your landscape the appearance of a river flowing through it.

First select the exact site in your yard. The goal is making sure you have enough room to make the creek long and at least 4 ft. wide in some parts and smaller in others with the right proportion and scale to look natural. Make sure it slopes away from your house so it can take away any excess water from rainfall, but stays on your property to supply deep rooted trees. Depending on the size you want, you're only going to need to dig down about six inches, using the excess dirt to build the sides of the creek. Make sure you put in several twists and turns as rivers like to make their own way as they flow. Smooth the ground after your excavation.



Next line the sides and bottom with some weed blocking cloth and anchor it down with cloth clips. Now you are ready for the rocks. The key to a natural look is a variety of sizes from large down to pea gravel. Different colors and textures also add a nice element. Wherever the river makes a twist or a turn lay larger rocks so the water flows around them. Then fill in with all the different assorted sizes. Random placement gives a nice natural feel, and full coverage is very important as the rocks over the years will settle and become less noticeable as years pass.



All rivers or creeks need to be crossed, so this is where you can be creative in building a wood bridge, choosing a style that compliments your home. Use treated wood for the base and redwood 2 x 6's for the top and 4 x 4 posts for the sides. Bore a hole through the top of the posts and link the posts by threading one-inch thick rope through the holes to complete the handrail. Finish it all with some wood stain and a glossy acrylic sealer. You can even put some stepping stones through your lawn leading to the bridge for added drama. Visit your local nursery and place some plants along the top and sides, remembering to get plants suitable for sun or shade, whichever the

case may be. Bergenia, split leaf philodendron, and azaleas are great for shade, while sage, yarrow, agapanthus and cannas are good for the sun. For that extra splash of color, fill in with your favorite blooming annuals each season.

Next summer you can grab a chair, relax with a cool glass of your favorite beverage, and imagine yourself in the mountains by your favorite river or creek. The best part is you've cut down on mowing, weeding, and wasting our precious water. Not to mention you are not putting trimmings into our ever growing landfill.



Yes, life is good! A river runs right in your own backyard oasis. Enjoy!

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