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Patrick Smith is trying to kill his grass.

Smith, who lives in Phoenix's historical
Ashland neighborhood, says he's returning

his yard to a more natural landscape for a desert climate.

He's gone through the process he calls re-desertification before, and is now bringing it home to the neighborhood no longer full of identical, matching squares of grass outlined by exactly even sidewalks.

The process is similar to a growing environmental landscaping trend called xeriscaping. According to the Xeriscape Landscaping Organization, "xeri" is Greek for dry.

The Center for the Study of Built Environments (CSBE) lists xeriscaping as a "water conserving landscape."

Their website, www.csbe.org, offers seven principles: planning and design, efficiently designed and maintained irrigation systems, use of mulch, soil preparation, appropriate turf, water-efficient plant material, and appropriate maintenance.

The CSBE also lists additional xeriscaping resources, and examples of xeriscaped

gardens in Tucson, Albuquerque, Las Vegas, and Denver.

Smith says there are two main practical advantages to going from grass back to desert.

The more natural landscaping and plants are much easier to maintain, and using less water means lower utility bills.

There are personal preferences, too.

“I don’t like grass in the desert,” said Smith. “I think it’s wasteful – I don’t have a goat.”

Smith has lived in Ashland neighborhood for over 10 years. He owns two houses, one on each side of the street. He and his wife, Theresa, live in one, their daughter and a roommate live in the other.

The other yard is being converted to desert landscaping too, and is incorporating a wide variety of rescue cactus into the grounds.

In Phoenix historical neighborhoods, the fronts of the houses are highly regulated

according to city regulations. They can be restored and maintained, but not changed. The interior and back of the houses are not regulated. Neither are the yards.

The Historic Preservation Office of the City of Phoenix describes the process that led to Ashland's green yards in its booklet on the neighborhood.

Grass came to the desert because of irrigation projects like the Roosevelt Dam completed in 1911 which "formed the basis for providing a consistent supply of water to the Valley on a year round basis."

Smith describes how Ashland became green, since grass wasn't normal in Phoenix before World War II.

"In the late 1940s and 1950s there was a civic project in Phoenix to get people to grow grass," said Smith.

The goal was to take advantage of the cooling effect grass has on its surrounding environment, as well as present a more appealing view for tourism.

However, grass is highly consumptive of water, Smith said, and a great deal of work to maintain in an arid environment.

Smith described his process for killing off the grass in his yard. As far as the grass, the first stage to killing it is simply to stop watering. Over the course of a few months, the grass will start to show the signs of neglect.

When Smith is ready, he'll use an Ortho brand chemical designed to kill only grass. Turning the yard over beforehand is optional. After one or two applications of the yard chemicals, Smith will be ready to put a layer of desert landscaping like small stones or sand over the yard.

Smith has already planted trees that do well with little to no moisture, like olive trees, mesquites and desert oaks.