Abstract:
Turfgrass yards dominate the residential landscapes of St Petersburg, Florida, and much of the rest of the urban and suburban United States. Increasingly, alternatives to the resource-intensive turfgrass lawn are the focus of interest among environmentalists, state and county governments, and growing numbers of residents in cities in the water-scarce Southeast and Southwest. Drawing on ethnographic and survey field research on everyday yard practices, resource use, and landscape perceptions, we explore the environmental and cultural dilemmas presented by the choice between conventional turfgrass and the more environmentally benign xeriscaping. We engage with Bourdieu’s notions of habitus, field, and distinction to explore how local and personal scale yards, as produced and consumed technonatures, mediate the scales of global environmentalism, national and regional cultural identities, classed aesthetics, and personal and collective security. We find that xeriscaping does not increase proportionate to income. We argue that yards are a display of cultural capital and that xeriscapers are invested in an environmental field that operates at an imagined global scale as opposed to the neighborhood and national scale values invoked with the traditional turfgrass lawn. Referring to Bourdieu’s work on taste and distinction, we argue that xeriscaped landscapes may entail a more environmentally benign set of landscaping practices but that the adoption of xeriscaping is no less implicated in the reproduction of privilege and distinction than is the traditional turfgrass lawn.

Keywords: Turfgrass; Xeriscape