



Water-Wise Landscaping (Xeriscape)

What is Xeriscape?

The term xeriscape is derived from the Greek word xeros meaning dry, combined with landscaping, thus xeriscaping. The goal of a xeriscape is to create a visually attractive landscape that requires less water. Properly maintained, a xeriscape can easily use less than one-half the water of a traditional landscape. Once established, a xeriscape will require less maintenance than turf landscape.

Why Xeriscape?

Xeriscaping Saves Water

Proper planning of the landscape and using drought-tolerant plants can significantly reduce water use.

Xeriscaping Saves Time

It de-emphasizes the use of bluegrass lawns and other thirsty plants. This common-sense approach can reduce the time you spend watering, fertilizing and mowing.

Xeriscaping Saves Money

Reducing water use can lower your water bill. Xeriscaping can also reduce maintenance costs and increase the beauty and value of your property.



Xeriscape vs. Zero-scape

Many people confuse xeriscaping with "zero-scaping." While both of these landscapes use less water than the traditional, turf-dominated approach, they are totally different in appearance and appeal. A Xeriscape can look as conventional and formal as you like. The look you choose can be highly individual. You might choose to create a distinctly western landscape with rock formations and indigenous plants. Or you could create a mountain meadow, complete with an ever-changing medley of wildflowers.

Seven Principles of Xeriscape

By applying xeriscape principles to your landscape, you will not only save water, but you will also enjoy the beauty and diversity of native and other water-wise (drought-tolerant) plants. Many delightful varieties of trees, shrubs, flowers, and grasses do very well in east Idaho's dry climate. The following seven principles serve as a basic introduction to successful xeriscaping.

1. Create Practical Turf Areas



A beautiful xeriscape starts with a good design. Contrary to what you may have heard, converting your yard to Xeriscape does NOT mean you have to get rid of all the grass. It does mean you need to think about where it makes sense to have grass, rather than just putting turf everywhere. In Idaho's semi-arid climate most grasses need a lot of supplemental irrigation to stay green and lush. That's why it's important to limit grass to areas in the yard where lawn is useful. Here's a good test. If the only time you walk on turf grass is when you mow it, you may not need lawn in that area.

2. Select Low Water Plants



Select plants that requires less water. Group plants according to water use so they can be watered appropriately. Here are a few of the considerations:

Sun: What portions of the property receive hot, afternoon sun? What portions receive morning sun and afternoon shade? The amount and time of sun will affect the types of plants you choose.

Function: Do you need an outdoor living area? If so, consider expanding the patio area with additional shade structures and low-water-use trees to provide privacy.

3. Plant Trees



Trees provide so many important benefits to the water-wise landscape. They shade the lawn, reducing water needs. They cool the yard and home. And divert the wind from the yard which also reduces water needs of the lawn and plants in the landscape. Trees can also shade a patio or deck, provide a place for kids to climb or have a tree house.

4. Amend the Soil



To enable your soil to better absorb and retain water, you may need to add soil amendments, such as *Planter Bed Mix* or *Soil Pep* before you plant. The water retention ability of most Idaho soils is improved with the addition of organic matter. If you are landscaping with native plants, however, soil amendments may not be necessary. Some well-adapted xeric plants prefer not to have too rich a soil. For these plants, doing as little as loosening the soil is all the soil preparation you will need.

5. Use Mulches



Surface mulches minimize evaporation, cool the soil, reduce weed growth and slow erosion. Mulches can also provide landscape interest and offer protective cover until plants mature. Organic mulches- including bark chips, soil pep, and compost- are commonly used in planting beds. Inorganic mulches, such as gravel and lava cinder, can be used to add texture and color under trees and around shrubs. Note: do not use *plastic* underneath rock or bark. It prevents the soil from breathing and encourages shallow plant roots; however, most cloth weed fabrics will allow for moisture and air to pass through to the soil.

6. Irrigate Efficiently



A well-planned and well-maintained irrigation system can significantly reduce a traditional landscape's water use. For the most efficient use of water, irrigate turf areas separately from other plantings. Other irrigation zones should be designed so low-water-use plants receive only the water they require.

Proper irrigation choices can also save water. Turf lawns are best watered by sprinklers. Trees, shrubs, flowers, and groundcovers can be watered efficiently with low-volume drip emitters, sprayers, and bubblers.

Adjust the frequency of your irrigations with the seasons. In all most no instances should you need to water more than every three days. Moisture sensors are available that automatically tell your sprinkler system when it is time to water.

7. Maintain your Landscape



Although most successful xeriscapes are low maintenance, they are not maintenance free. Keeping your xeriscape beautiful and water thrifty through a program of well-timed mowing, fertilizing, pruning, pest control, and weeding will ensure that your landscape will develop beautifully.

To ensure continued water savings, keep irrigation systems properly adjusted. Mow your lawn 2-3 inches in height. And mulch your clippings whenever you can.

*This flyer was adapted from information from New Mexico State Engineer Office Water Conservation Program publication entitled *The Enchanted Xeriscape: A Guide to Water-wise Landscaping in New Mexico*. Additional information can be found on the web at www.ose.state.nm.us, www.waterwiseplants.utah.gov, and www.xeriscape.org.*

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