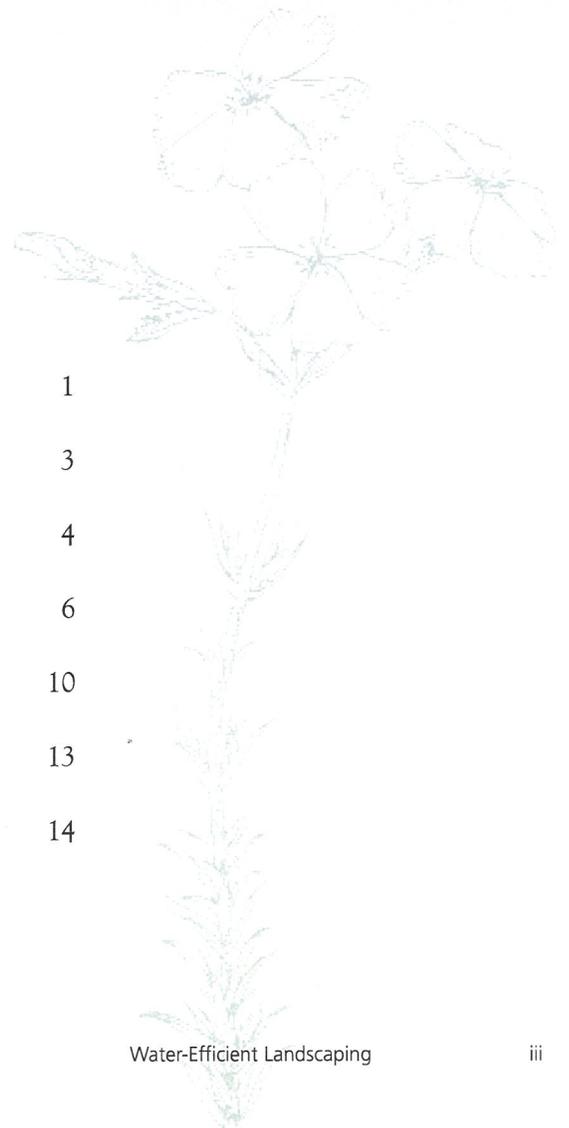




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What is Water-efficient Landscaping?

Water, many agree, is our most precious natural resource; without it, life ceases. Yet judging by our water use and consumption practices, many of us in the United States seem to take it for granted. A typical household uses approximately 260 gallons of water per day. “Water conscious” individuals often install high-efficiency shower heads and toilets and wash only full loads of clothes and dishes to reduce consumption. But in the summer, the amount of water used outdoors by a household can exceed the amount used for all other purposes in the entire year. This is especially true in hot, dry climates.

Gardening and lawn care account for the majority of this seasonal increase, but other outdoor activities, such as washing cars and filling swimming pools, also contribute. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, of the 26 billion gallons of water consumed daily in the United States¹, approximately 7.8 billion gallons, or 30 percent², is devoted to outdoor uses. The majority of this is used for landscaping. In fact, it is estimated that the typical suburban lawn consumes 10,000 gallons of water above and beyond rainwater each year (Vickers, p 140).

Many mistakenly believe that stunning gardens and beautiful lawns are only possible through extensive watering, fertilization, and pesticide application. As this booklet will demonstrate, eye-catching gardens and landscapes that save water, prevent pollution, and

protect the environment are, in fact, easily achieved by employing water-efficient landscaping. Water-efficient landscaping produces attractive landscapes because it utilizes designs and plants suited to local conditions.

This booklet describes the benefits of water-efficient landscaping. It includes several examples of successful projects and programs, as well as contacts, references, and a short bibliography. For specific information about how to best apply water-efficient landscaping principles to your geographical area, consult with your county



Xeriscape garden at Denver Water

extension service and local garden and nursery centers. Local governments and water utilities also possess a wealth of information and suggestions for using water more efficiently in all aspects of your life, including landscaping.

¹ W.B. Solley, R.R. Pierce, and H.A. Perlman. 1998. *Estimated Use of Water in the United States in 1995* (USGS Circular 1200). USGS. Reston, VA. p.27.

² Amy Vickers. 2001. *Handbook of Water Use and Conservation*. WaterPlow Press. Amherst, MA. p. 140.



Xeriscaped front yard in Colorado Springs

Many terms and schools of thought have been used to describe approaches to water-efficient landscaping. Some examples include “water-wise,” “water-smart,” “low-water,” and “natural landscaping.” While each of these terms varies in philosophy and approach, they are all based on the same principles and are commonly used interchangeably. One of the first conceptual approaches developed to formalize these principles is known as “Xeriscape³ landscaping.” Xeriscape landscaping is defined as “quality landscaping that conserves water and protects the environment.” The word “Xeriscape” was coined and copyrighted by

Denver Water Department in 1981 to help make water conserving landscaping an easily recognized concept. The word is a combination of the Greek word “xeros,” which means “dry,” and “landscape.”

The seven principles upon which Xeriscape landscaping is based are:

- Proper planning and design
- Soil analysis and improvement
- Appropriate plant selection
- Practical turf areas
- Efficient irrigation
- Use of mulches
- Appropriate maintenance

The eight fundamentals of water-wise landscaping, below, illustrate the similarities in the underlying concepts and principles of Xeriscape landscaping and other water-efficient approaches.

- Group plants according to their water needs.
- Use native and low-water-use plants.
- Limit turf areas to those needed for practical uses.
- Use efficient irrigation systems.
- Schedule irrigation wisely.
- Make sure soil is healthy.
- Remember to mulch.
- Provide regular maintenance.

In short, plan and maintain your landscape with these principles of water efficiency in mind and it will continue to conserve water and be attractive.

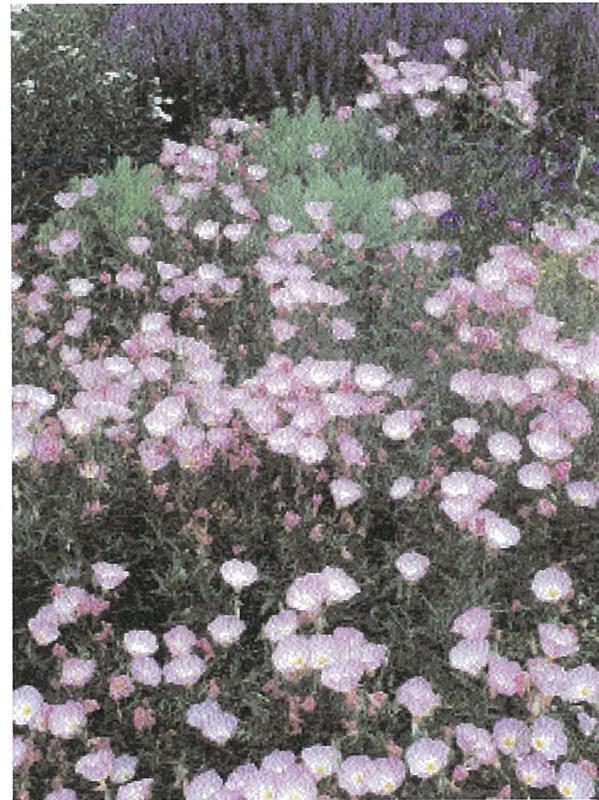
³ Denver Water welcomes the use of the term Xeriscape in books, articles, and speeches promoting water conserving landscape. EPA is using this term with permission from Denver Water. For permission to use “Xeriscape” in your publications, call Denver Water at 303 628-6330.

Why Use Water-efficient Landscaping?

Proper landscaping techniques not only create beautiful landscapes, but also benefit the environment and save water. In addition, attractive, water-efficient, low-maintenance landscapes can increase home values.

Water-efficient landscaping offers many economic and environmental benefits, including:

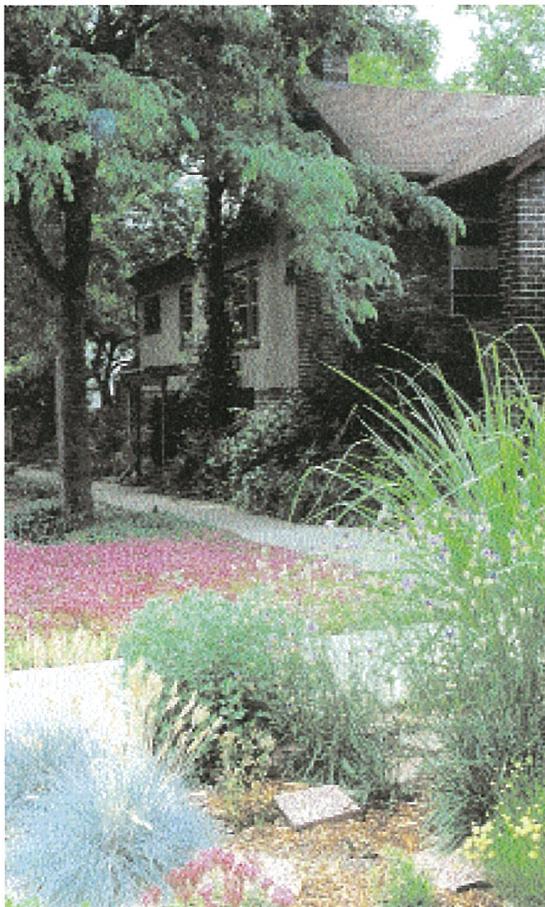
- Lower water bills from reduced water use.
 - Conservation of natural resources and preservation of habitat for plants and wildlife such as fish and waterfowl.
 - Decreased energy use (and air pollution associated with its generation) because less pumping and treatment of water is required.
 - Reduced home or office heating and cooling costs through the careful placement of trees and plants.
- Reduced runoff of stormwater and irrigation water that carries top soils, fertilizers, and pesticides into lakes, rivers, and streams.
 - Fewer yard trimmings to be managed or landfilled.
 - Reduced landscaping labor and maintenance costs.
 - Extended life for water resources infrastructure (e.g., reservoirs, treatment plants, groundwater aquifers), thus reduced taxpayer costs.



Meadow Sage (Salvia pratensis) is the background for New Mexico Evening Primrose (Oenothera berlandieri 'siskiyou')

How is Water-efficient Landscaping Applied?

Landscaping that conserves water and protects the environment is not limited to arid landscapes with only rocks and cacti.



Dragon's Blood Sedum (Sedum spurium) under Honeylocust Trees (Gleditsia triacanthos)

Through careful planning, landscapes can be designed to be both pleasing to the senses and kind to the environment. One simple approach to achieving this is applying and adopting the basic principles of water-efficient landscaping to suit your climatic region. The seven principles of Xeriscape landscaping are used below to describe these basic concepts in greater detail.

Developing a landscape plan is the first and most important step in creating a water-efficient landscape. Your plan should take into account the regional and micro-climatic conditions of the site, existing vegetation, topography, intended uses of the property, and most importantly, the grouping of plants by their water needs. Also consider the plants' sun or shade requirements and preferred soil conditions. A well-thought-out landscape plan can serve as your roadmap in creating beautiful,

water-efficient landscapes and allow you to continually improve your landscape over time.

Soil analysis and improvements

Because soils vary from site to site, test your soil before beginning your landscape improvements. Your county extension service can analyze the pH levels; nutrient levels (e.g., nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium); and the sand, silt, clay, and organic matter content of your soil. It can also suggest ways to improve your soil's ability to support plants and retain water (e.g., through aeration or the addition of soil amendments or fertilizers).

Appropriate plant selection

Your landscape design should take into account your local climate as well as soil conditions. Focus on preserving as many existing trees and shrubs as possible because established plants usually require less water and maintenance. Choose plants native to your region. Native plants, once established, require very little to no additional water beyond normal rainfall. Also, because they are adapted to local soils and climatic conditions, native plants commonly do not require the addition of fertilizers and are more resistant to pests and disease.

When selecting plants, avoid those labeled "hard to establish," "susceptible to disease," or "needs frequent attention," as these types of plants frequently require large amounts of supplemental water, fertilizers, and pesticides. Be careful when selecting non-indigenous species as some of them may become invasive. An invasive plant might be a water guzzler and will surely choke out native species. Your state or county extension service or local nursery can help you select appropriate plants for your area.

The key to successful planting and transplanting is getting the roots to grow into the surrounding soil as quickly as possible. Knowing when and where to plant is crucial to speeding the establishment of new plants. The best time to plant will vary from species to species. Some plants will thrive when planted in a dormant or inactive state. Others succeed when planted during the season when root generation is highest and sufficient moisture is available to support new growth (generally, spring is the best season, but check plant tags or consult with your local nursery for specific species).

Practical turf areas

How and where turf is placed in the landscape can significantly reduce the amount of irrigation water needed to support the landscape. Lawns require a large amount of supplemental water and generally greater maintenance than other vegetation. Use turf where it aesthetically highlights the house or buildings and where it has practical function, such as in play or recreation areas. Grouping turf areas can increase watering efficiency and significantly reduce evaporative and runoff losses. Select a type of grass that can withstand drought periods and become dormant during hot, dry seasons. Reducing or eliminating turf areas altogether further reduces water use.

Efficient irrigation

Efficient irrigation is a very important part of using water efficiently outdoors, and applies in any landscape—whether Xeriscape or conventional. For this reason, an entire section of this booklet addresses efficient irrigation; it can be found on page 6.

Use of mulches

Mulches aid in greater retention of water by minimizing evaporation, reducing weed growth, moderating soil temperatures, and preventing erosion. Organic mulches also improve the condition of your soil as they decompose. Mulches are typically composed of wood bark chips, wood grindings, pine straws, nut shells, small



Wine Cup (Callirhoe involucrata) and Sunset Hyssop (Agastache rupestris) in the Denver Water Xeriscape Garden

gravel, or shredded landscape clippings. Avoid using rock mulches in sunny areas or around non-arid climate plants, as they radiate large amounts of heat and promote water loss that can lead to scorching. Too much mulch can restrict water flow to plant roots and should be avoided.

Appropriate maintenance

Water and fertilize plants only as needed. Too much water promotes weak growth and increases pruning and mowing requirements. Like any landscape, a water-efficient yard will require regular pruning, weeding, fertilization, pest control, and irrigation. As your water-efficient landscape matures, however, it will require less maintenance and less water. Cutting turf grass only when it reaches two to three inches promotes deeper root growth and a more drought-resistant lawn. As a rule of thumb, mow your turf grass before it requires more than one inch to be removed. The proper cutting height varies, however, with the type of grass, so you should contact your county extension service or local nursery to find out the ideal cutting height for your lawn. Avoid shearing plants or giving them high nitrogen fertilizers during dry periods because these practices encourage water-demanding new growth.

Water-efficient Landscape Irrigation Methods

With common watering practices, a large portion of the water applied to lawns and gardens is not absorbed by the plants. It is lost through evaporation, runoff, or being pushed beyond the root zone because it is applied too quickly or in excess of the plants' needs. The goal of efficient irrigation is to reduce these losses by applying only as much water as is needed to keep your plants healthy. This goal is applicable whether you have a Xeriscape or a conventional landscape.

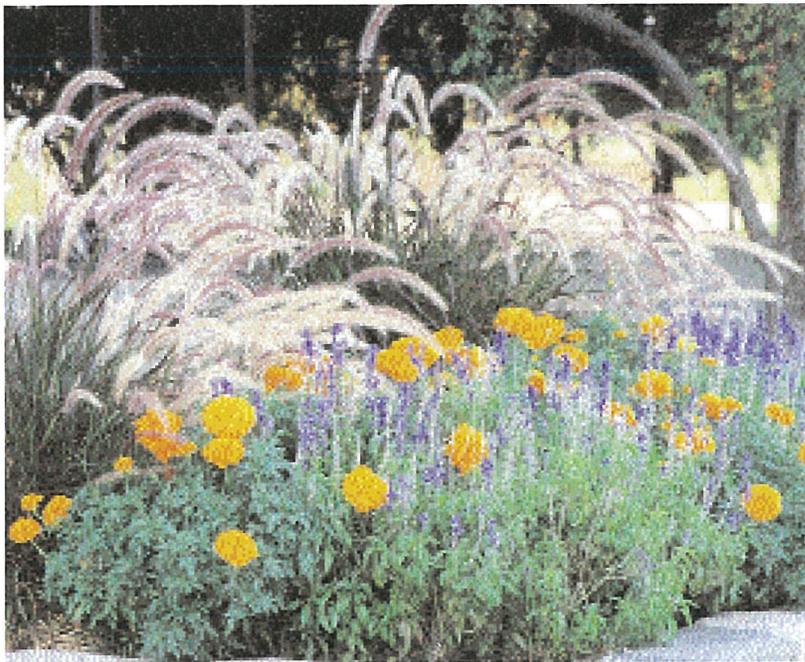
To promote the strong root growth that supports a plant during drought, water deeply and only when the plant needs water. For clay soils, watering less deeply and more often is recommended. Irrigating with consideration to soil

type, the condition of your plants, the season, and weather conditions—rather than on a fixed schedule—significantly increases your watering efficiency. Grouping plants according to similar water needs also makes watering easier and more efficient.

Irrigating lawns, gardens, and landscapes can be accomplished either manually or with an automatic irrigation system. Manual watering with a hand-held hose tends to be the most water-efficient method. According to the AWWA Research Foundation's outdoor end use study, households that manually water with a hose typically use 33 percent less water outdoors than the average household. The study also showed that households with in-ground sprinkler systems used 35 percent more water, those with automatic timers used 47 percent more water, and those with drip irrigation systems used 16 percent more water than households without these types of systems. These results show that in-ground sprinkler and drip irrigation systems must be operated properly to be water-efficient.

You can use a hand-held hose or a sprinkler for manual irrigation. To reduce water losses from evaporation and wind, avoid sprinklers that produce a fine mist or spray high into the air. Soaker hoses can also be very efficient and effective when used properly. Use a hand-held soil moisture probe to determine when irrigation is needed.

To make automatic irrigation systems more efficient, install system controllers such as rain sensors that prevent sprinkler systems from turning on during and immediately after rainfall, or soil moisture sensors that activate sprinklers only when soil moisture levels drop below pre-programmed levels. You can also use a weather-



Purple Fountain Grass (Pennisetum setaceum "Rubrum") and Marigolds (Calendula officinalis) in planter bed