



Gardening with Less Water



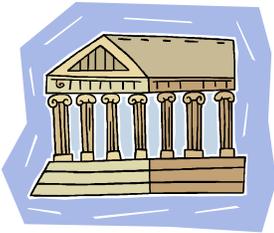
A Garden Grows



Gardens are collections of plants that we grow in spaces like a window box, schoolyard, or backyard. All we need to create a garden is space, soil, water, sun and some seeds or plants. There are many types of gardens

we can grow. For instance, we can grow gardens that provide us with food and flowers, and we can grow gardens that provide food for **native**, or local, birds and other wildlife. We can also grow gardens that use a lot or a little bit of water. Gardens that use little water are called a **xeriscape**.

A Greek Word



Xeriscape (pronounced: ZIH-rih-skape) is a type of **landscaping**, or garden design that saves water by growing plants that need little water.

The word “xeros” comes from the Greek word meaning “dry.” So a xeriscape is a dry landscape or a dry garden. If you live in Florida, where it rains a lot, it will be hard to have a xeriscape in your yard. However, if you live in California or other dry areas, you can grow a xeriscape garden that doesn’t need a lot of water!

Planning your Garden



The first thing you need to do when planning a xeriscape is to look at the area that will be planted. Are there plants there already? Will those plants stay or be removed

to create the new garden? Is the area to be planted near a fence or a wall where it gets lots of shade, or is it out in the wide open where it gets a lot of sun? Is it at the top of a slope or the bottom of a slope where water run-off collects? After answering those questions, choose a variety of plants with different heights, colors, and textures. This creates a beautiful and interesting garden.

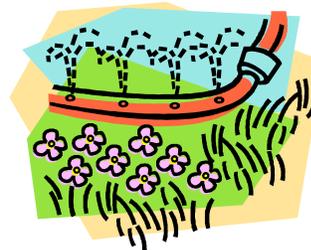
Improving the Soil



Soil is another word for dirt. Plants need soil to grow. What kind of soil is in the garden? Is it loose and sandy? Is it thick like clay? Is it

somewhere in between? Soil that is too loose and sandy can’t hold water. Soil that is thick like clay is slow to **absorb**, or soak up, water and is slow to release it. To improve sandy or clay-like soil, you may need to add 1-2 inches of **compost** to the soil before planting. Compost looks like dirt and is a natural way to add vitamins to the soil and give plants the **nutrients**, or vitamins, they need to grow. If you use native plants in your xeriscape, then you do not need to add compost. Simply loosen the soil before you plant.

Smart Watering



A xeriscape can be watered **efficiently** by hand. This means it uses the least amount of water needed for plants and doesn’t waste water. It can also be watered with an automatic sprinkler system. If using a sprinkler, make sure it doesn’t

throw water high in the air or put out a fine mist of water. These types of sprinklers waste water by missing the plants and by allowing more water to **evaporate**, or get heated into a gas by the sun. Sprinklers should cover just the garden—not sidewalks, driveways or other paved areas. The most efficient sprinklers slowly put out big drops of water and keep them close to the ground. This is called **drip irrigation**. The best time to water plants is in the mornings when it's still cool. Water only when needed. Over-watering can kill plants and waste water.

Location, Location, Location



Different areas in your garden get different amounts of sunlight, wind and moisture. To save water, group together plants that

need the same amounts of sunlight and water, and then place them in the right spot in your garden. For instance, if a plant needs full sunlight, put it in the center of the yard, instead of under a tree or against a shady wall. A good rule is to put plants that need a lot of water in **low-lying**, or flat areas where water collects, or in the shade of other plants. It's also helpful to put these plants near the hose where it is easy to water. Put plants that use less water in dry, sunny areas. Since these plants won't need to be watered as often, it's okay if they're far from a hose.

Use a Blanket of Mulch



Mulch is usually **organic** or living matter made from things like tree bark chips, old leaves, straw, or grass clippings. Mulch is like a blanket that covers

your garden and keeps the soil moist and soft. Putting mulch on the ground around your plants helps keep plant roots cool and prevents the soil from getting dry and crusty. It also helps reduce water evaporation after you've watered your plants, and helps stop weeds from growing. As plants grow and spread, they'll cover the mulched areas. **Inorganic** or non-living mulches include rock and gravel. They are good for windy spots, because they're too heavy to blow away.

Native Grasses Instead of Lawn



Traditionally, most people in the United States use green grass to cover their lawns. These grasses usually need a lot of water to stay green. Instead of planting a green lawn, plant native grasses that naturally

grow in the **region**, or general area, where you live. These grasses will use less water, be easier to care for, and look naturally beautiful.

Caring for your Xeriscape



During the first year or two, your new xeriscape will probably need a fair amount of weeding.

Once your plants grow and mature, they will crowd out the weeds

which means you will need to spend less time working in the garden. In addition to pulling weeds, your xeriscape will need proper watering, fertilizing and insect control, preferably with natural treatments like garden soap. When your xeriscape garden is well taken care of, you save a lot of water and you can sit back and enjoy its beauty!