

# The 7 Principles of Xeriscape



## 1. Planning and Design

Any beautiful landscape starts with a good design and a delightful Xeriscape is no different. Before you move a shovelful of dirt or plant a single flower, start with an overall plan for your Xeriscape.

The physical characteristics of the site should be considered. Also consider your needs and your aesthetic preferences. Here is just a sampling of the issues you should think about when planning your landscape:

- ◆ **Function**—Do you need an active recreation area? If so, for what activities? A small turf area may be what you need. Do you need an “outdoor living room?” If so, consider expanding your patio area with additional shade structures and low-water-use trees and shrubs to provide privacy. Also consider the views you want to protect or screen.
- ◆ **Sun**—What portions of your property receive morning sun? What portions receive hot, afternoon sun? Where are the shady spots? The amount and time of sun exposure will affect the types of plants you select.
- ◆ **Time**—How much time do you want to spend maintaining your landscape? If you’d rather enjoy your yard than work in it, choose low-maintenance plants! Whether you’re an avid do-it-yourselfer and plan to design your own yard, or choose to use the services of a landscape design professional, a properly designed Xeriscape will meet your needs and provide beautiful—and water-wise—surroundings.



## 2. Soil Improvements

You may need to add soil amendments before you plant. This will enable your soil to better absorb water. The water-retention abilities of most of Arizona soil is improved with the addition of organic matter (such as compost).

However, if you’re landscaping with native plants, you may not need to add anything to your soil. Many well-adapted xeric plants actually prefer not to have soil that’s too rich. For these hardy natives, all you’ll need to do is loosen the soil before you plant.

## 3. Appropriate Turf Areas

If Kentucky Bluegrass were native to Arizona, we’d call it Arizona Bluegrass, wouldn’t we? Kentucky Bluegrass is a “cool season” grass that requires a minimum of 40 inches of water per year to stay lush and green. Remember, some cities average less than 14 inches of precipitation per year. That’s why we have to water Bluegrass so much here in the high desert.

If we’re going to be serious about saving water, we have to rethink our lawns. Instead of using a lawn to cover large areas of ground, choose your lawn size to fit your family’s needs. If you don’t need a football field-sized turf area, try planting a smaller lawn. Consider planting water-wise groundcovers and shrubs.

Instead of using grasses that need lots of supplemental water, consider these drought-tolerant options (Seed for all recommended grasses are in stock at Plant Fair Nursery):

### **Cool Tip:**

Applying Xeriscape principles to your home landscape will save water—but that’s just the beginning! You’ll also enjoy the beauty and diversity of native and other water-wise plants. Many delightful varieties of grasses, flowers, shrubs and trees will do very well.



- ◆ **Buffalo Grass**— Uses  $\frac{2}{3}$  to  $\frac{1}{4}$  the amount of water that Bluegrass requires
- ◆ **Plant Fair Nursery's Low Maintenance Drought Tolerant Mix**—A blend of good-looking grasses that are easy to grow and uses about  $\frac{1}{2}$  the water Bluegrass requires
- ◆ **Re-Vegetation Mix**—This blend of wild grasses is used by the USFS to re-vegetate areas devastated by wildfires. The grasses come and go with the moisture nature provides
- ◆ **Re-Vegetation Mix with Wildflowers**—Same grasses as above with wildflowers added for the look of a true native meadow



#### **4. Low-Water-Use Plants**

Choose native and low-water-use plants whenever possible. A wonderful variety of water-wise plants can grow throughout Arizona—from the low deserts of the south to the mountains of the north. Some of these plants are perfect for adding year-round greenery and texture. Other native plants are great for adding a splash of seasonal color.

Xeriscape landscaping uses the concept of “zoning”—grouping together plants with similar water needs. Plants that need very little water are grouped together in a zone, while thirsty plants and lawns are grouped together in another zone.



#### **5. Efficient Irrigation**

Proper and efficient irrigation saves water. For the most efficient use of water, irrigate turf areas separately from other plantings. Design irrigation zones so low-water-use plants receive only the water they need.

Choosing the right kind of irrigation can also save water. Lawns are usually watered by sprinklers. Trees, shrubs, flowers and groundcovers are best watered with low-volume drip emitters, sprayers, and bubblers.

Remember, too, that even the best-designed irrigation system must be maintained to retain its optimum efficiency! Fix leaks and make sure the water lines are clean and unobstructed.



#### **6. Mulching**

Mulches are soil coverings that minimize evaporation, cool the soil, reduce weed growth and slow erosion. Mulches can also provide visual interest to a landscape while offering a protective cover until plants mature.

Organic mulches (bark chips, wood grindings, etc.) are commonly used in planting beds. Inorganic mulches (such as gravel and decomposed granite) can be used to add texture and color under trees and around shrubs.

Never use plastic sheeting underneath rock or bark. It prevents the soil from breathing and encourages shallow plant roots. A better alternative is a permeable landscape fabric.



#### **7. Proper Maintenance**

Even though successful Xeriscapes are low maintenance, they aren't completely maintenance-free. To ensure that your Xeriscape stays beautiful and water-wise, you'll need to periodically fertilize, prune, weed, mow and control pests.

To ensure continued water savings, keep irrigation systems properly adjusted. A well-planned and properly maintained Xeriscape requires even less work as it matures. And that gives you more time to enjoy your yard!



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#### **Cool Tip:**

It's important to know the mature size of the plants and trees you select to ensure that you get the views or privacy you desire.

