

## Xeriscape—It's Not a Science Fiction Movie

Xeriscape...sounds like a futuristic movie with alien land formations. Or the most frightful project ever assigned in a science class. But don't let the name scare you. It's really a simple concept, one you can put to work in your own garden. And once you realize how simple it is, and begin implementing it in your landscape and gardens, you can use the term at social gatherings and on social media to astonish your less knowledgeable friends.

Xeriscaping is all about conserving: conserving water, conserving soil, conserving effort, and even conserving your money. Imagine beds of colorful flowers, healthy shrubs and trees. Imagine more time for admiring your gardens and less time sweating in the heat. Imagine a water bill that's not shockingly high.

Xeriscape is a gardening practice that maximizes water efficiency while creating an attractive landscape at the same time. Over 40 years ago, the Xeriscape concept was developed in arid regions of the country where rainfall is scarce. Even Oklahoma gardeners who are familiar with the term often associate it with just the cactus and succulents, sparseness and scarcity. Not these days! The variety of plants available is immense and sufficient to satisfy any gardener's vision.



Xeriscape combines water efficiency and beauty

Efficient use of water is one of the primary goals of xeriscaping. Group plants together according to the amount of water they need to thrive. This will make sure your plants don't get drowned by too much watering or parched by too little. Drought tolerant native plants use water most efficiently. They develop deep root systems and are well-adapted to Oklahoma's weather patterns. New cultivars of native plants provide a full range of heights and colors to fit many different gardens. Don't be afraid, though, to group them with non-native plants that have the same water requirements. You don't have to limit yourself.



Poppy Mallow (*Callirhoe involucrata*)

Remember, too, that not all the plants in your gardens must be drought tolerant. Nobody is asking you to give up some of your beloved, thirstier plants. Just make sure your watering system is adjusted to match only the amount of water each group needs.

This is why overhead watering systems are not recommended for gardens. Certainly, sprinklers can be purchased inexpensively and are easy to set up. But they deliver the same amount of water to every plant whether it's needed or not. Overwatering can drown plant roots, leading to weak growth. Worse, it can also provide the ideal environment for many fungal diseases.

Go easy on the fertilizer. Over-fertilizing can also lead to growth problems. Eager gardeners often use too much nitrogen (N) which can cause exuberant but weak stem growth leading to floppy

plants that normally would be upstanding garden citizens. Excess Phosphorus (P) can run off into streams and rivers causing algae blooms and fish die-off. Have your soil tested before planting. Dig up some soil and bring it to your OSU Extension Office. It's inexpensive to perform a soil test; it will let you know what nutrients your soil needs and how much. No need to waste money on unneeded, excess nutrients that are potentially harmful.

The best watering system for a xeriscape is drip irrigation. The very mention of this can cause even experienced gardeners to groan. Old drip systems were tediously complicated and time consuming to install. However, newer systems have emitters built right into the delivery system so that installation is as easy as laying out a hose. For plants that need a bit more water, soaker hoses also deliver water directly to plant's roots.



In-line drip tubing reduces evaporation



Cottonseed hull mulch

Once the irrigation is in place, mulch. Mulch, mulch, mulch. Spread mulch over the drip lines and soaker hoses. When you do need to water, mulch will: moderate the soil temperature, keep the soil moisture from evaporating, suppress weed growth, and keep the soil from washing away in strong summer rainstorms. Organic mulch (wood chips, cedar mulch, cottonseed hulls, leaves, etc.) is usually best as it tends to decompose over time, thus adding nutrients to the soil. Rock or pebbles can be used as mulch for some plants, but rock reflects additional sunlight and heat onto plants. Rock also absorbs heat and radiates it even after the sun has set. While some plants can withstand this additional heat, most cannot.

With Xeriscaping you can have a vibrantly colorful garden, save time and effort and money. Best of all you'll be helping the environment more . . . by doing less. What a great contribution for a gardener!

To find out a bit more about Xeriscaping, take a look at some of the links that follow.

[Water-wise Gardening...OSU Cooperative Extension Service](#)

[Drought Tolerant Plants for Oklahoma--OSU fact sheet HLA-6444](#)

[Xeriscaping-Kansas State Univ Cooperative Extension Service](#)

[Earthkind Gardening-Texas A&M Univ Extension Service](#)

[Xeriscaping Perennials-Colorado State Univ Extension](#)