

XERISCAPE

With all the rain we've had this year it's hard to remember that Northeastern Oklahoma is usually a lot drier in the summertime. Now that the monsoons have passed it's a good time to take a look at water thrifty Xeriscape gardening.

So, what is xeriscape gardening? Is it a yard filled with yucca, rocks, and cactus? All dull colors and no grass? Xeriscape (pronounced zir-i-scape) is creative, attractive landscaping that saves water. The word Xeriscape is from the Greek xeros meaning dry and scape from the word landscape. It was first used by the Denver Water Department and is now a common landscaping term. Such water-wise landscapes are designed to work with periods of natural rainfall and be hardy enough to withstand extended periods of drought.



The Seven Basic Principles of Xeriscape

1. Planning and Design

What do you want your xeriscape garden to be? Do you want to include play areas, pet-friendly zones, or private spaces? Do you want to include turf grass? Soil type, slopes, drainage, and available sunlight are all important considerations. What is your budget?

2. Improve the Soil

Healthy soil with lots of organic material holds more water and provides better growing conditions to help plants thrive with less water. The first step for your xeriscape and for any great garden is a soil test. Check out the soil sampling page on our website (tulsamastergardeners.org) for step-by-step instructions.

3. Practical Use of Turf

Turf grasses are a common part of most landscapes, but many require significant amounts of water to maintain. Less lawn equals less water needs. Use native grass species such as buffalo grass, which requires much less water than fescue or hybrid Bermuda grass. Consider planting a ground cover instead of grass in open areas that will get less foot traffic. Pervious hardscape materials that will let water infiltrate rather than runoff are an excellent choice for high traffic areas.

4. Mulch

Add 2-3" around your plants to keep soil moisture in and help keep weeds out making less work for you - and it looks good, too! Organic mulch breaks down over time to slowly add nutrients back to the soil reducing the need for fertilizer.

5. Efficient Irrigation

Create watering zones that group plants according to their water needs. Turf areas require more water so irrigate them separately. Drip systems

deliver water slowly to the roots of just the plants you want to water (not weeds).

6. Choose Low Water Demanding Plants

Oklahoma native plants are good choices for your xeriscape garden. Choose plants that look good as well as saving water. Check out OSU Extension's "Xeriscape Garden Plants for Oklahoma" information sheet L-333 for recommendations.

7. Good Maintenance Practices

Practices such as correct mowing height, pruning and weeding all contribute to water savings and healthy plants.

During Oklahoma's scorching summer months as much as 50% of all water is used on outdoor landscapes. Xeriscaping is a colorful and attractive way to have a beautiful landscape with less water and less work.

You can get answers to all your gardening questions by calling the Tulsa Master Gardeners Help Line at 918-746-3701 or by emailing us at mg@tulsamastergardeners.org, or come see us at our Diagnostic Center at 4116 E 15th St., Tulsa, OK.

Sources

OSU Extension information sheet [L-458, "Water Wise Landscape Principles"](#)

OSU Extension information sheet [L-332 "Xeriscape Demonstration Garden"](#)

OSU Extension information sheet [L-333 "Xeriscape Garden Plants"](#)