

Welcome to Xeriscaping!

Xeriscaping is the fine art of creating water-efficient landscapes by using plants that are appropriate to the natural environment. The term xeriscape is derived from the Greek word, *xeros*, which means dry. And dry is a pretty good way to describe the natural landscapes of New Mexico—no matter where in the state you live!

But xeriscapes aren't dry and dull. Well-designed xeriscapes are enchanting and beautiful. The best xeriscapes use a fraction of the water needed by traditional lawn-dominated landscapes. (Some xeric plants require little or no supplemental watering once they are established.) And xeriscapes require far less ongoing maintenance.

Xeriscaping with water-wise plants makes sense in New Mexico. This brochure gives you step-by-step information that will help you convert your old, water-thirsty landscape into an attractive water-wise xeriscape.



JUST BECAUSE XERISCAPES SAVE WATER DOESN'T MEAN THEY HAVE TO BE DRY AND BORING. THE XERIC LANDSCAPE ABOVE RECREATES THE FEEL OF A MOUNTAIN STREAMBED.

Xeriscaping Is Not "Zeroscaping"

Once upon a time, some landscapers used lots of rocks and a few sparse plants to create low-water-use landscaping. This kind of landscaping is now called "zeroscaping." It is not the same as xeriscaping.

Genuine xeriscapes are lush and beautiful. Xeriscapes use a wide variety of native and other water-efficient plants to create color, interest and an oasis-like feeling.

Because it uses so much rock and so few of the same plants, zeroscaping tends to be hot and boring.

Xeriscaping is the natural and water-wise way to beautify New Mexico. Accept no substitutes!

How Much Does It Cost?

If you hire a landscape designer and start from scratch, installing a xeriscape is not much more expensive than a high-water-use landscape. Paying a professional to install your landscaping may cost from \$1.00 to \$4.00 a square foot or more, depending upon the complexity of your job.

Of course, once you've got your landscape plan you can save 50% or more of the cost by doing the installation yourself. You might choose to have the hardscape and irrigation system professionally installed and then install the plants yourself.

Plan on paying a professional \$0.60 or more per square foot to convert an existing irrigation system. A do-it-yourself irrigation conversion will typically cost approximately \$0.20 per square foot. (It's advisable to consult a professional to determine if your existing irrigation system can be used.)



ADD BRIGHTLY COLORED NATIVE FLOWERS SUCH AS PENSTEMON TO YOUR XERISCAPE.

To Learn More

New Mexico's climate varies greatly from north to south and from low to high elevation. The specific climate characteristics of your area will directly affect the plants that will grow and thrive. For more information about New Mexico's climate zones and specific plants recommended for each area, see *The Enchanted Xeriscape* brochure available from the State Engineer Office Water Conservation Program.

Suggested Reading

Natural by Design by Judith Phillips, *Plants for Natural Gardens* by Judith Phillips, *Native Plants for Southwestern Landscapes* by Judy Mielke, *The Xeriscape Flower Gardener* by James Knopf, *Sunset Western Landscaping Book* edited by Kathleen N. Brenzel, *Xeriscape Plant Guide* Fulcrum Publishing

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State Engineer Office Water Conservation Program

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101 Xeriscape

A Step-By-Step Guide to Creating a Water-wise Yard



State Engineer Office Water Conservation Program

Consider a Three-Year Conversion Plan

Whether you choose to do your own xeriscaping or hire a professional, you have the option of converting your landscape all at once or in stages. Here's one way to convert your landscape using a three-year timeline:

Start by listing your needs and evaluating your site. Then complete your design. Begin making the structural changes (enlarging the patio area, adding a shade structure, etc.) If you're anxious to start planting, select an area away from the house that can be converted to an arid zone. If necessary, cap the nearby sprinkler heads and modify the existing watering system to suit the new plantings. Begin removing plants that don't fit into your new plan, including difficult-to-control perennial weeds, such as bindweed, and bermuda grass.

YEAR
One

Now it's time to introduce the new design elements into your xeriscape. Reduce your turf area (if that's part of your plan). Finish converting your irrigation system by capping sprinkler heads or converting them to multi-emitter hydrants. Add your new xeric plants. You might also want to plant some annuals this year to fill in the empty spaces until your perennials and xeric shrubs grow in.

YEAR
Two

Your xeric plants are now becoming established, so you should be able to cut back on the supplemental water. Finish planting, then concentrate on maintenance. Remove competitive plants and weeds. Make sure there's at least a three- to four-inch-thick layer of mulch around your plants and trees. Check the irrigation system periodically and repair any clogs or leaks. Enjoy your low-maintenance yard!

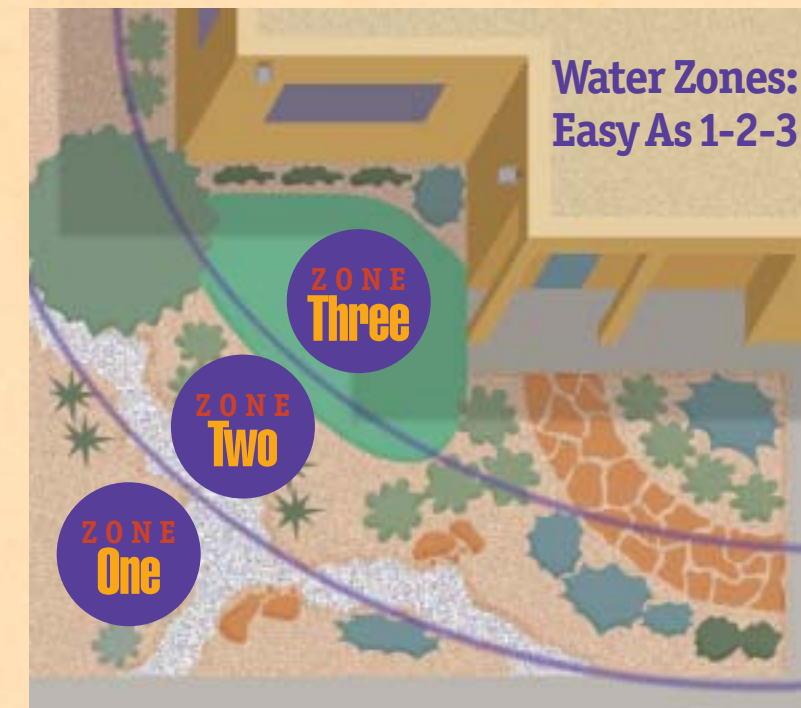
YEAR
Three



Before & After



PHOTOS COURTESY J. HUNTER TEN BROECK



In xeriscaping, plants are grouped into specific zones based upon the water needs of the plants and the functions you want your yard to serve. Zoning creates a water-efficient landscape that is both beautiful and functional.

Zone 1: Arid

The arid zone features the most drought-tolerant vegetation. Choose native plants and other varieties that rarely require supplemental watering. Often, the most arid zones are located away from the house and other high-traffic areas.

Zone 2: Transition

The transition zone is used to blend lush areas with the drier parts of a landscape. This zone takes advantage of low- and moderate-water-use plants. Choose plants that need infrequent supplemental watering (once a week or less).

Zone 3: Mini-Oasis

The lush, mini-oasis zone includes the highest-water-use plants and your lawn area. The shady north and east sides of your home are perfectly suited for oasis areas. This zone can also include areas that receive rainfall runoff from roof lines and downspouts. Try to place this zone near your house.

Water Tips



A MULTI-EMITTER HYDRANT CAN REPLACE AN OLD SPRINKLER HEAD.



DRIP EMITTERS DELIVER A SPECIFIED AMOUNT OF WATER PER HOUR—TYPICALLY FROM A HALF GALLON TO AS MUCH AS FOUR GALLONS. PHOTOS COURTESY OF RAINDRIP, INC.

New Plants Need More Water

Even the most drought-resistant native plants need supplemental water during the first year or two to get established. Once established, reduce supplemental watering or eliminate it altogether (depending upon the plant). Follow instructions from a plant nursery and/or check each plant for clues to the water it needs.

How Much Mulch?

One cubic yard of mulch will cover 100 square feet of landscape to a depth of three to four inches. Shredded bark and crushed rock are two of the most popular types of mulch, and both are readily available at garden center stores or through landscape contractors.

The Basics of Drip Irrigation

Drip irrigation is the perfect method for watering most shrubs, perennials and trees. Drip irrigation systems save water because they deliver slow, steady amounts of water directly to plant roots. As a result, drip systems cut down on evaporation, runoff and overspray.

Drip systems can be professionally installed by most landscape contractors. For do-it-yourselfers, drip irrigation kits are available at hardware stores, home centers and nurseries.

A five-step guide to creating a water-wise landscape



STEP One

Make a Wish List

Before you lift a shovel, before you purchase a single plant, before you call a local landscaper for assistance, you need to ask yourself a few questions about the kind of yard you want to create.

What's Your Primary Focus?

Is water conservation, low maintenance or a wildlife-friendly habitat your primary goal? Is having an aesthetically beautiful yard that's the envy of the neighbors at the top of your wish list? All of these are important considerations and will influence the design of your landscape.

How Will the Landscape Be Used?

If you need an active recreation area where the kids can play, a small turf area may be in order. If what you really want is an "outdoor living room" where you can lounge in a hammock and enjoy the views, consider expanding your patio area with additional shade structures and adding low-water-use trees and shrubs to provide privacy.

What Do Your Favorite Landscapes Look Like?

Xeriscape styles can range from the formal look of an English country garden to the native look of a naturally occurring New Mexican land-

scape. What "look" are you most comfortable with? Your landscape should reveal your personality while reflecting the regional ecology. Pay close attention to your favorite landscapes so you can re-create some of their best features in your yard.

Is Privacy Important to You?

Landscaping can do a marvelous job of shielding your property from the next-door neighbors. Conversely, there may be views you want to enhance. Knowing the mature size of the plants and trees you ultimately select will ensure that you get the views or privacy you desire.



STEP Two

Take Inventory

The physical characteristics of the site should be considered. Every property has its own "micro-climates" which will affect design and plant choices. For example, the sunny west and south sides of a house typically have warm micro-climates and are well suited for arid, drought-tolerant plants. The cooler north and east sides offer better climates for oasis zones. (For more information, see the "Water Zones: Easy As 1-2-3" section.)

As you conduct a walk-through inspection of the site, pay particular attention to the existing plants. Are there some plants which are in decline

and should be removed? Are there some plants that you absolutely want to keep? Established plants that will remain in the landscape will influence the water zoning of your new design.

Downsize Your Lawn

Instead of using turf grass to cover large areas of ground, choose your lawn size to fit your family's needs. Consider drought-tolerant grasses such as buffalograss and blue grama, or water-wise groundcovers and shrubs.

Also examine your existing irrigation system. Note the location of your sprinkler heads. Can any

parts of the present system be converted for your new xeriscape? Using existing irrigation for your new "mini-oasis" zones can make the conversion to xeriscape easier and less expensive. (Keep in mind that it's best to have your lawn on one irrigation system valve and your trees, shrubs and flowers on another.)

This is also a good time to walk around the neighborhood and visit local garden stores to identify the plants you'd like to have in your new landscape. There are also many high quality books about southwestern plants and design which you can use as resources.



STEP Three

Make a Plan

Now that you've done your "homework," it's time to sit down and design your new landscape. You can create your own landscape plan or you can call upon a professional designer or landscaper for assistance. Either way, you must incorporate your needs and wants from Step 1 and the physical characteristics from Step 2 into an overall landscape design.

Your design will consist of the hardscape (paving and walkways), the architectural features (such as shade structures and walls), the irrigation system and the plants you want.

Hardscapes and Architectural Features

If you plan to make major renovations to your landscape that involve construction of shade

structures, new patio areas and/or new walkways, you might want to hire a professional landscaper. If you're going to do it yourself, look for ideas and instructions in garden design books. The sales staff at local home center stores can also be helpful in deciding what materials you'll need and how to get the job done.

Irrigation System

Your new irrigation system should be designed to incorporate your xeriscape plan's water zones. For efficient use of water, turf and other high-water-use areas must be irrigated separately from native and xeric plants. Turf lawns are best watered by sprinklers or subsurface irrigation. Trees, shrubs, flowers and groundcovers can be watered efficiently with low-volume drip emitters, sprayers and bubblers.

Low-Water-Use Plants

Choose native and low-water-use plants whenever possible. A wonderful variety of water-wise plants can grow in New Mexico. Some plants are perfect for adding year-round greenery and texture, others are great for adding a splash of seasonal color. Select the plants that are best suited to your region and to your site's micro-climates.

For beauty and visual interest all year long, select evergreen plants to cover at least 20-30% of your landscape.

Your final xeriscape design should meet your needs and provide beautiful and water-wise surroundings.



STEP Four

Install Your Xeriscape

Hardscape, Irrigation and Plants

Now that all the planning is done, it's time to get to work! Start with the big jobs first. A good rule of thumb: construction first, then irrigation system, then planting.

Before you begin any construction projects yourself (such as creating walkways or grading the soil), seriously weigh the advantages of getting professional assistance. Hiring a pro can make the job go much faster (but it will also be more expensive).

You may want to consult with an irrigation professional for advice on a new watering system to ensure that your trees, shrubs, plants and grasses receive the appropriate amounts of water.

Using your xeriscape plan, examine the property again for ways to use concrete and rooftops to direct rainwater to plants. You can also direct

water to planting areas by creating berms (hills) and swales (depressions).

As you convert your landscape to xeriscape, modify or replace your irrigation system as needed. Make sure plants with similar watering needs and rooting depths are watered by the same irrigation valve. And always place your lawn on a separate valve from other plantings.

In some cases, conventional lawn spray-heads may be converted to drip systems with multiple outlet adapters for drip emitters. (Because drip systems require less than 30 pounds per square inch of water pressure, a pressure-reducing valve will be needed to protect the system.) Soaker hoses and micro-sprayers are other irrigation options.

Set up your drip system so that it drains properly to prevent freezing. Make sure that it can be cleaned or flushed out to prevent clogging. Your irrigation system must also meet code

regulations and should have backflow preventers to protect your family's safety.

Remember, you should not mix bubblers, drip emitters and lawn sprinklers on the same automatic zone. Irrigation companies, garden stores or other professionals can provide valuable advice.

Soil Improvements

Before you plant, you may need to add soil amendments (such as compost) that will enable your soil to better absorb water. 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 too rich a soil. For these hardy natives, all you'll need to do is loosen the soil a little before you plant. (Ask the nursery professional where you buy your plants about the specific soil requirements of the plants you select.)



STEP Five

Maintain and Enjoy!

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 and to maintain an effective weed barrier, keep a three- to four-inch-thick layer of mulch around your plants. Remember that even the best-designed irrigation system must be maintained to retain its optimum efficiency. Check regularly for broken

sprinkler heads, leaks, clogged drip emitters or lines, and blocked sprinkler heads. Make needed repairs or modifications immediately.

Now that the hard work is over, you'll have more time to enjoy your new xeriscape!

THIS LOVELY LANDSCAPE (LEFT) FEATURES A WATER-WISE LAWN OF SLOW-GROWING BLUE GRAMA GRASS AND LAVENDER-FLOWERED CREEPING THYME.