



Your Full Service Nursery & Landscape Center
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Creating & Maintaining a Water-Wise Landscape

July is Smart Irrigation Month – and irrigation is an important topic in desert communities.

Here's a relatively unknown but significant fact: in many communities, 30 to 50 percent of the total water is used for landscape irrigation.

We certainly do not want to discourage homeowners from landscaping! A well-designed and maintained landscape is not only enjoyable for the homeowner but also provides food and nesting sources for songbirds, hummingbirds and butterflies while increasing the value of a home.

The amount of water used by a homeowner is greatly affected not just by the types of plants in their landscape but where they are planted and how they are watered.

This brings us to a type of landscaping called Xeriscape. Xeriscape is "water conservation through creative landscaping." The term was coined in 1981 by the Denver Water Department. It is a combination of the word "landscape" and "xeros", the Greek word for "dry".

Unfortunately, this term is often misunderstood and pronounced "Zeroscape" which leads people to think it means an empty landscape! Not true!

Xeriscape is composed of seven principles that help to reduce water use for landscapes in dry regions.

Below is a summary of these principles:

1. Plan and design: a well-designed landscape is not only more pleasing but will also conserve water through proper plant choice and placement. The emphasis should be on plants that are water-wise and adapted to local soils but thirsty plants can be used in appropriate areas.
2. Soil amendments: amending your soil with compost will aerate clay soil and help sandy or rocky soil absorb more water. If you are using native plants, amendments are not necessary.

3. Efficient irrigation: drip or bubbler emitters are most efficient for trees, shrubs and perennials. The most efficient spray emitters put out big drops and keep them close to the ground. With oscillating sprinklers and those that throw water high into the air, much of the water is lost to evaporation. Water deeply and infrequently, either in the morning or evening.

4. Zoning of plants: observe your yard to become familiar with the amount of light, wind and moisture that different areas receive then group your plants in the appropriate areas according to the plants' needs. For instance, group high-water use plants near a downspout, in a low-lying area that collects water, or in the shade of other plants. Low water-use plants should be grouped separately in dry, sunny areas.

5. Mulch: mulching around plants will keep plants' roots cool, control weed growth and, most importantly, minimize evaporation reducing how often plants need watered. Organic mulches such as shredded bark will also add organic matter to the soil as they decompose. Rock mulch should not be used along the west or south side of homes as the mulch will retain heat and make plants more thirsty.

6. Turf alternatives: reducing the amount of turf in a landscape significantly reduces water use. You can also consider alternatives to the traditional thirsty bluegrass lawn including native grasses such as Blue Grama and Buffalograss.

7. Appropriate maintenance: plants that are not stressed by pests, weeds or improper watering will be healthier and more beautiful.

For a more information on Xeriscape visit: www.denverwater.org and click on the Conservation link.