



## FACT SHEET

# Xeriscape Is Not a Garden, It's a System

Denver Water coined the term Xeriscape in 1981 and with the help of plant and landscape experts, developed seven Xeriscape principles. Xeriscape is more than planting low-water plants, such as Yucca, landscaping with rocks or reducing the size of your lawn; it's an entire system of principles that reduces water needs. Approaching Xeriscape as an entire system will help you create not only a water-wise yard, but also a beautiful and sustainable landscape. Some of the most attractive yards in Colorado were planned and planted using these seven principles of Xeriscape.

### 1. Plan and design landscaping comprehensively

Start with a site inventory and analysis, and note existing conditions such as drainage, exposures, soil types, and existing plants. Think about how your yard will be used, including traffic patterns and access points. Use this information to integrate both plants and hardscapes into the design.

### 2. Evaluate soil and improve if necessary

Improve soil with organic matter (compost) and other suitable amendments before planting. Soil improvements help plants absorb water and promote proper drainage, which improves plant health.

### 3. Create practical lawn areas

Include grass where it provides defined functions (i.e., recreation and traffic areas). Grass is best separated from plantings of trees, shrubs, ground covers and flowers so it can be watered separately. Choose the appropriate grass for the desired use. Alternative grasses for some areas may include tall fescue, buffalograss, blue grama and wheat grass. Often, portions of lawn can be replaced with more water-efficient ground covers and mulches.



#### 4. Use appropriate plants and group by water needs

Plants with lower water requirements, such as native species already adapted to Colorado's climate, should be considered. However, other plants can have a place in Xeriscape designs, even if they require larger amounts of water. The key is to use those plants in appropriate locations and not to interplant them with others that have very different, lower water requirements. In effect, the groupings of plants are separated into different zones based on their water requirements, which allows them to be watered more efficiently.



#### 5. Water efficiently with a properly designed sprinkler system

Water according to the condition of the plants, not on a fixed schedule, following your water provider's guidelines. Well-planned sprinkler systems can save water when properly installed, maintained and operated. Apply only as much water as the soil can absorb to avoid runoff waste. Trees, shrubs, flowers and ground covers can be watered more efficiently by hand or drip irrigation. To promote healthier plants, water infrequently, but deeply.



#### 6. Use mulches

Mulch reduces surface evaporation of water and controls weeds. Mulched planting beds are an ideal replacement for expansive turf areas. Mulches cover and reduce temperature extremes in the soil, minimize evaporation, reduce weed growth and slow erosion. Mulches also provide landscape interest. Organic mulches are typically bark chips, wood grindings or pole peelings. Inorganic mulches include rock and various gravel products. Place mulch directly on the soil or on breathable fabric. Do not use impermeable sheet plastic beneath mulched areas.



#### 7. Maintain your landscape

To maximize water savings, prune, weed, mow and fertilize, plus pay attention to the sprinkler system and adjust as needed. Regular maintenance preserves the intended beauty of the landscape, and saves water and money.



#### For more information:

**Green Industries of Colorado** – [www.greenco.org](http://www.greenco.org)  
Industry Best Management Practices and conservation resources

**Plant Select** – [www.plantselect.org](http://www.plantselect.org)  
Water-wise plants suitable for the Rocky Mountain region

**CWCB Drought Response Portal** – [www.coh2o.co](http://www.coh2o.co)  
Drought conditions and state-wide watering restrictions

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