Water Efficient Landscaping

Getting Started

Water is just one component of your landscape planning—but in the arid west, it’s an extremely important component. Planning for water efficiency in your landscape design not only helps the environment, it also helps you avoid unnecessary headaches and heartaches over foiled plantings and disappointing designs.

More than half of the water consumed by an average household is used for landscaping. In the summer months water use can increase by 250%, the majority of which goes for outdoor watering. Xeriscaping, a practice based on designing an attractive, sustainable landscape that minimizes water use and sound horticultural principles, is one possible solution to this problem.

Xeriscape is coined from the Greek word Xeros, which means dry. But unlike the dry unattractive landscape some people may picture when they hear the term, xeriscaped landscapes can be both beautiful and water efficient. Xeriscaping is an excellent alternative to a “traditional” landscape, makes wise use of our water supply, and helps keep your water bills reasonable.

Whether planning a new landscape or renovating an old one, following these principles will help you save water and achieve your gardening goals.

Plan and design comprehensively. When making plans for your garden, think about how you use your yard. Do you entertain guests, need a place for children to play, want to block an ugly view? Once you have determined your needs, consider the view, the slope, sun exposure, placement of structures, existing vegetation, and the soils of the area. Create a plan deciding where things will be and when different areas will be done; Landscapes are often installed in phases.

Create practical turf areas. Lush green lawns can be beautiful, but they are one of the largest consumers of water in a landscape. Reducing turf areas or locating them at the bottom of slopes where they collect runoff and have proper drainage can significantly reduce water use. This does not mean all turf areas should be eliminated. By selecting water efficient varieties and properly locating turf, it can still play an important function in the landscape.

Use water-efficient plants. A plant list is included inside this handout. Gardening books and your local nursery are other good sources for plant suggestions. Plants native to your local area are often well adapted to arid conditions and are also good garden candidates.

Water efficiently with properly designed irrigation systems. The irrigation system should be well planned and managed. Drop or trickle irrigation systems apply the water where it does the most good: directly to the soil. This reduces evaporation and saves you time now spent watering by hand. Not all plants need the same amount of water. Group plants with like water needs together. Also, irrigation needs change with the season and the weather. Water needs vary with plant variety, soil conditions, temperature and rainfall. Needs also change as plants mature.

Use organic mulches to reduce evaporation. Mulches minimize evaporation, reduce weed growth, slow erosion, and help prevent soil temperature fluctuations. When applied at a depth of 3-6 inches, mulches can be one key to a successful water efficient landscape.

Practice appropriate maintenance. The quality and efficiency of the xeriscape will be best maintained through proper pruning, weeding, and attention to the irrigation system.

For more information please contact your local conservation district or UC Extension (Master Gardeners chapter). Special thanks to the UC Davis Arboretum, Master Gardeners, and the UC Davis Herbarium.
Here are a few examples of water efficient plants. Using such plants in your landscape could help improve water use efficiency. Check with a local nursery to see which plants are available in your area. Remember to also consider the overall look of your landscape before deciding on which plants to use.

**Plant List**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trees</th>
<th>Groundcovers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caledocodes decurrens</td>
<td>Baccharis philaris, dwarf</td>
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<tr>
<td>California fuchsia</td>
<td>forms dwarf coyote brush</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Juniperus horizontalis</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Bar Harbor’ Bar Harbor juniper</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Osteospernum</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hypericum calycinum</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Saint Johnswort</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cotinus coggyria, prostrate</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ceanothus, creeping wild lily</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verbena tenuisecta</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nandina domestica, heavenly</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>bamboo</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Photinia × fraseri</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pittosporum tobira</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Japanese mock-orange</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fremontodendron californicum</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>common flannel bush</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mahonia aquifolium ‘Compacta’</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[synonym Berberis aquifolium]</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Compactum’</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dwarf Oregon grape</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verbena tenuisecta</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Shrubs**

- Arctostaphylos manzanita
- Rosa roses
- Pyracantha firethorn
- Syringa vulgaris common lilac
- Cistus rockroses
- Arbatus unedo strawberry tree
- Eschscholzia bifida [synonym E. montevidensis]
- white California poppy
- Feijoa sellowiana [synonym Acca sellowiana]
- pineapple guava
- Thuya orientalis & T. occidentalis, shrub forms
- Abies arborvitae

**Perennials**

- Eschscholzia californica
- California poppy
- Achillea filipendulina
daisy leaf yarrow
- Agapanthus ‘Peter Pan’
- dwarf lily-of-the-Nile
- Armeria
- thrift, sea pink
- Diascia cordata
twining
- Diets vegeta
- fortnight lily
- Eriogonum umbellatum
- sulfur flower
- Hemerocallis
daylily
- Penstemon
- beard tongue
- Epilobium canum [synonym Zauschneria]
- California fuchsia

**Deciduous**

- Quercus lobata
  - valley oak
- Acer truncatum
  - Shantung maple
- Zelkova serrata
  - Japanese zelkova
- Prunus dulcis
  - Chinese pistachio
- Celtis occidentalis
  - common hackberry
- Quercus douglasii
  - blue oak
- Sapium sebiferum
  - Chinese tallow tree
- Robinia × amigus ‘Idahoensis’
  - Idaho locust
- Gymnocladus dioica
  - Kentucky coffee-tree
- Sophora japonica
  - Japanese pagoda tree
- Koelreuteria paniculata
  - goldenrain tree
- Lagerstroemia indica & hybrids
crape myrtle

**Broadleaved Evergreens**

- Buxus
  - lancea
  - African sumac
- Casuarina cunninghamiana
  - beefwood
- Quercus ilex
  - holly oak
- Quercus suber
  - cork oak
- Quercus agrifolia
  - coast live oak
- Larus nobilis
  - Grecian laurel
- Maytenus boaria
  - mayten tree
- Prunus lalandei
  - hollyleaf cherry
- Xylosma congestum
  - sykomos

**Arbustive**

- Aesculus californica
  - California buckeye
- Ribes
  - Rubus
  - Actinidia kolomikta
  - kiwi
- Parthenocissus quinquefolia
  - Virginia creeper
- Rubus x hygrophilus
  - trailing blackberry
- Euonymus fortunei
  - burning bush
- Acer
  - ‘Stella’
- Robinia × amigus ‘Idahoensis’
  - Idaho locust
- Gymnocladus dioica
  - Kentucky coffee-tree
- Sophora japonica
  - Japanese pagoda tree
- Koelreuteria paniculata
  - goldenrain tree
- Lagerstroemia indica & hybrids
crape myrtle