



## Xeriscaping



The term xeriscape may be defined as a landscape that emphasizes water conservation. Derived from the Greek word transliterated as xeros, meaning “dry”, xeriscaping uses specific landscape design elements and management practices to achieve the goal of water conservation. Xeriscaping is not necessarily a parched, barren look, nor a no-maintenance (e.g., all rock) approach. Xeriscaping refers to water-wise, climate-appropriate gardening.

Xeriscapes make good economic sense and ecological sense if properly executed, considering California’s limited water supply and that about one-fourth of the water consumed in urban areas of the state is used in landscape irrigation. If properly executed, xeriscapes can be less costly but just as beautiful as traditional landscapes.

Xeriscaping, as was mentioned, is not necessarily the same as “zero-scaping” - where the elements of gravel, stone and cement dominate - but may also encompass other goals, such as creating habitat, using native plants, responding to the local environment, and using inspiration and materials from the regional landscape. One can say that xeriscape is a method of landscaping that that can use drought-tolerant and/or native plants that naturally thrive in a dry environment, and therefore require less water and maintenance, once established, when compared to traditional landscapes.

Xeriscapes follow several principles:

- Plants are grouped according to their requirements for sun and water; for example, ferns with baby’s tears and Apache plum with rosemary.
- Irrigation system zones correspond to plant requirements. For example, shrubs may need water once a week, but flowers may require water once per day.
- Irrigation systems emphasize uniformity. The emitter types and placements should be appropriate for the type of plant material being irrigated.
- Turf is used for function more than for appearance. If properly selected and managed, turf can be a water-thrifty plant material.
- Islands of intensely managed and irrigated plant materials are used for accent. A tasteful grouping of plants can make a strong statement with much less water than rambling shrubs or turf.
- Plants are selected for climatic conditions to which they are well adapted. Xeriscape is not limited to natives, and plants requiring high moisture or humidity can be used in suitable microenvironments.
- Hardscape elements, such as patios and decks, are used in the landscape design. These enhance the outdoor environment, require no water, and can provide additional color through the use of container plants.
- The landscape is managed to conserve water. Irrigation frequency and duration are adjusted at least four times a year because water use rates vary greatly from season to season.

A good xeriscape is economical. Appropriate xeriscape plants are available at no greater cost than plants that demand more water. Precise application of water reduces weed growth and plant diseases.

A good xeriscape combines function and beauty. Crushed gravel from the street to the front door is not California xeriscape. Variations in plant and landscape color, texture, and form are part of a xeriscape design.

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