

Use of Mulches

Mulch is a layer of nonliving material covering the soil surface around the plants. It can be organic, such as pine bark, compost, and woodchips, or inorganic, such as lava rock or permeable plastic (not sheet plastic). A good mulch conserves water by significantly reducing evaporation from the soil. Mulch also reduces weed populations, prevents soil compaction, and keeps soil temperatures more moderate. Use mulches wherever possible.

Appropriate Maintenance

The added benefit of a xeriscape™ landscape is that it typically requires less maintenance. A well-designed landscape can decrease maintenance by as much as 50% through reduced mowing and mulch applications and more efficient watering techniques. Preserve the beauty of your landscape and maintain the water conservation design by pruning, weeding, using proper fertilization and pest control, and making irrigation system adjustments.



Further Information

Clemson University maintains a Xeriscape™ garden at the South Carolina Botanical Garden, which is located at 102 Garden Trail, Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina. Additional information is available from the website for the South Carolina Botanical Garden at

www.clemson.edu/scbg



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Xeriscape Gardening



Spartanburg Water installed a xeriscape™ (zeer-i-skayp) garden in 2003 at the Commerce Street location. *Xeriscaping*™, a word coined by combining *xeros* (Greek for “dry”) with *landscaping*, is a water-conservative approach to landscaping. Plants whose cultural requirements are appropriate to the local climate are emphasized,



and care is taken to avoid wasting water to evaporation and run-off. This garden incorporates the seven basic principles which lead to saving water:

- Planning and Design
- Soil and Analysis
- Practical Turf Areas
- Appropriate Plant Selection
- Efficient Irrigation
- Use of Mulches
- Appropriate Maintenance

These principles, when combined, create a comprehensive approach to landscaping for water conservation. A traditional landscape may incorporate one or two principles of water conservation, but a xeriscape™ garden will utilize the entire concept to reduce landscape water effectively.

How Do I Begin?

To plant a xeriscape™ garden you incorporate the seven principles by:

Starting With A Plan

To plan for efficient water use, begin with a landscape design for your yard. It can be created by a landscape designer, a nursery man, a county extension agent, a local landscape architect, or you. The design should consider the budget, appearance, function, maintenance, and water requirements. Remember that a plan can be completed in one season or installed gradually over many years.

Soil Analysis & Preparation

Soil preparation is essential to ensure that plant health is maintained. If possible, have a pH test through the local county extension office to determine if soil amendments are necessary. To increase the ability of the soil to absorb and store water, add organic matter such as peat moss and till it into the soil. Incorporating the organic matter is not necessary for trees or for large turfgrass areas

Practical Turf Areas

When you select a turfgrass for your landscape, consider the amount of water necessary to maintain it. Evaluate the intended use, planting location, and maintenance requirements before finalizing your choice. Planting the lowest water use turf grass adapted to the region is an effective way to reduce landscape irrigation requirements. To significantly reduce water use, it may be necessary to reduce the size of water-sensitive lawns through the use of patios, decks, shrub beds, and groundcovers.



Appropriate Plant Selection

It is important to select trees, shrubs, and ground covers based on their adaptability to the region's soil and climate. A xeriscape™ garden does not need to be cactus or rock gardens. Utilizing many native plants into your landscape will lower water demands and reduce pest problems and fertilizer requirements. Many local nurseries carry a variety of native plants or plants that easily adapt to the South Carolina climate.

Efficient Irrigation

Much of the tremendous amount of water applied to lawns and gardens is never absorbed by the plants and put to use. Water is lost to runoff if it is applied too rapidly, and it evaporates in exposed, unmulched soil. The greatest waste of water is applying too much too often. Sprinkler irrigation is the most commonly used method of landscape watering. If you have a permanent sprinkler system, make sure the sprinkler heads are adjusted properly to avoid watering sidewalks and driveways. A properly adjusted sprinkler head sprays large droplets instead of a fog of fine mist, which is more susceptible to evaporation and wind drift. Water between late evening and mid-morning to avoid excessive waste due to rapid evaporation.

Drip irrigation can be utilized in garden beds to increase water efficiency. It applies water where it is needed and minimizes runoff and evaporation.