



SO WHAT IS XERISCAPE???

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Many people have the image of xeriscape (or "zeroscape" as they call it) in their minds as a landscape of rock. That rather sounds like a moonscape and nothing at all like what xeriscape really is.

The term xeriscape actually originated right here in Colorado. It basically describes a way of landscaping to both conserve and make better use of water. After having gone through a season or two of watering restrictions, you can appreciate the need for something like this here!

There is a set of principles involved in xeriscape. First, and of great importance, is to have a plan. You can do this yourself with a little research and help from the experts at local garden centers, or hire a professional to do it for you. Foremost in importance is to group plants with similar water needs, taking into account the exposure and slope of an area.

Soil preparation is another very important consideration when gardening in Colorado. Our soils tend to be either clay or sand, with no happy medium. There just isn't much natural organic material in our soils! Add organic amendments whenever planting anything, and do it annually if possible. In the case of something permanent like a lawn, be sure to do a good job the first time since it's literally a one-time opportunity.

Expanses of nicely mulched areas with a cluster planting of water-wise plants is an ideal solution. Consider keeping lawn areas nearer the house with more water-wise plantings farther out. Mulch in itself is an integral part of xeriscape. A blanketing of organic mulch after planting helps to reduce evaporation and keep soils cool in our hot summer sun.

One last thing to mention here is method of watering. Drip irrigation is an ideal means of getting water to plants. It applies moisture directly to the ground without spraying it in the air. No matter what your method of watering, however, infrequent, deep soakings are the best way to go. They help to develop a strong, deep root system. Frequent, shallow waterings should be avoided. They encourage roots to develop nearer the surface (ever see tree roots you could trip over???) in areas that dry out much more quickly.