

How To



Create a Xeriscape™ Garden

Colorado is a semi-arid state; the Front Range region receives a paltry average of fourteen inches of precipitation a year. Therefore, some garden plants that grow like gangbusters in other parts of the country are too thirsty to thrive here. However, Colorado gardeners can still grow beautiful and diverse gardens. Creative approaches to landscaping can cut residential lawn and garden water usage by up to 50 percent. During droughts, a water-wise garden will thrive and provide color during an otherwise dusty, brown season.

1. **Choose plants appropriate for your local environment.** Long gone are the days when a xeriscape meant a field of rocks and “zero” plant life. Many local nurseries stock colorful perennials and shrubs that grow well in our sunny, dry climate. The use of native plants can provide habitat for Colorado birds, butterflies and bees. However, not all Colorado plants are appropriate for local gardens; plants accustomed to the cooler, wetter zones of the mountains should be reserved for those microclimates.
2. **Plant plants with similar water requirements together.** Hydrozoning is the grouping of plants according to the microclimates they thrive in. If you have a hot, dry spot, put all your most drought-tolerant perennials and shrubs there. Your thirstier annuals and vegetables should grow where water is most available. The first year or two of a new garden will require more water than after the plants have successfully established.
3. **Make responsible turf choices.** Homeowners can save water, money and gas by cutting lawn back to where it is most needed—a children’s play area, for example. Lawns can be replaced attractively with groundcovers and shrubs. Where turf is required, drought-tolerant species such as blue grama and buffalograss are good bets.
4. **Install efficient irrigation.** There’s no point to planting drought-tolerant perennials, if water is subsequently wasted through evaporation and run-off. Homeowners should check often for leaks and faulty nozzles. Keep water low to the ground and water at cooler times of day to reduce evaporation loss. Irrigation needs will also change with seasonal temperatures; plants will be less thirsty in spring and fall, and gardeners can cut back accordingly.
5. **Drought-tolerance begins with the soil.** Many gardeners grapple with Colorado’s clay soil. Clay is slow to absorb water and slow to release water to nearby roots. Clay soil is also likely to be compacted, which impedes water absorption. By adding compost to the soil, the gardener improves the soil’s ability to hold water in a useful manner. Mulches, such as bark chips or decomposed granite, keep soil temperatures low and slows drying.

For additional resources about Xeriscape™ gardening, visit <http://www.xeriscape.org>.

