

## Xeriscaping

**Xeriscaping isn't limited to desert landscapes.**

While the thought of xeriscaping may bring to mind an image of a dry, desert scene, that doesn't have to be the case! Xeriscaping plants can range from anything from classic drought-tolerant succulents to prairie plants to ornamental grasses. Even cottage garden-type plants can thrive in a xeriscape design.



Xeriscaping is a drought-resistant landscaping practice using carefully selected plant species tolerant to long periods of dry weather and covering the soil with mulch, rocks, or plants to retain moisture. You'll save time and money while you conserve water.

### Tips for installing your xeriscaping

Traditional lawns require frequent watering to keep them looking lush. Consider reducing the amount of lawn on your property by installing your own xeriscape using the following six principles of xeriscaping:

1. Group plants according to water needs. Plant thirsty plants together to concentrate watering in specific areas, rather than "blanket" watering. Like any plants, drought-tolerant species still need to be watered while they establish. A good rule is a deep watering once every other day for the first two weeks, ensuring that it slowly reaches deep into the soil. Follow this with a couple months of less frequent deep watering during dry weather.
2. Build soil lips or soil basins around plants to direct water to plant roots. Depending on plant size, this basin should be 3 to 18 inches from the base of the plant.
3. Retain moisture by covering any exposed soil with mulch or rock and consider designing your plants to form a groundcover.
4. Keep garden beds weed-free. Weeds take up water that could be used by desirable plant material.
5. If your soil drains too quickly, amend it by adding moisture-holding organic matter or consider using coastal plants that are adapted to these conditions.
6. Pick the right plant for the right spot. Choose plants that thrive in hot, dry conditions.

## Choosing the right plants makes all the difference.

### Consider perennial native plants instead of lawns



Traditional lawns can require frequent watering to keep them looking lush. When possible, consider garden beds with perennial plants native to your region. Many have extensive root systems that help them survive long periods of dry weather, helping you to create a drought-resistant xeriscape garden. Once established, these gardens generally don't require watering, saving you money while reducing the demand on natural resources.

### Design for the area

For design inspiration, look to natural areas, although you may want to interpret your design for the property's scale, which is likely smaller. One strategy is to emphasize an iconic feature, such as a mass planting of Prairie Dropseed with seasonal flowers, to represent a prairie. Another approach is to contain the bed with a defined border. Whatever your design, check local municipal or homeowner's association ordinances to ensure compliance.

### Tips for successful native plant installation:

1. Know your property's site conditions and select native plants that work best for them.
2. Before digging, call JULIE at 811 or 800-892-0123 or visit [www.illinois1call.com](http://www.illinois1call.com) to place a local utility request. When you know it's safe to dig, start by preparing your garden bed.
3. If you are using small plugs, consider soaking them in a small bucket. It can be difficult to rehydrate them once they dry out.
4. To plant, dig a hole as deep and a little wider than the pot the plant came in. If the plant is root-bound, cutoff the bottom ¼ inch of the roots to stimulate new growth. Place the plant in the hole and backfill with soil. Be sure the level of the plant's soil matches the level of the ground around it.
5. Add 2 to 3 inches of natural shredded mulch, leaving a circle approximately 2 inches in diameter of bare soil around the stem.
6. Water your new plants every other day for two weeks if it doesn't rain. After two weeks, additional watering may be necessary if the weather is hot and dry.
7. Your native plant may not bloom in the first two years while it's busy putting down deep roots. To have color during perennial establishment, you can intermingle them with annuals.
8. Although native plants are often described as low maintenance, this does not mean no maintenance, especially in the first two years. During this critical time, expect to pull weeds and to maintain the mulch layer to discourage unwanted plants.

## Popular blooming "dog day" plants

All of these plants will survive the hot days of August with very little attention and care, requiring only an occasional pruning off of old blossoms. Try one or two next year and enjoy your garden all season long.

- Celosia, or cockscomb (*Celosia argentea*), is unique for its unusual feathery or brain-like flowers of bright red, yellow, orange, and pink. Celosia is an annual that may grow from 6 inches to 4 feet tall, depending on the variety. Bring fresh cut celosia inside for an excellent accent flower, or hang it to dry.
- Spider flower (*Cleome hassleriana*) can reach 4 to 5 feet tall in full sun. The unique spider-like flowers are rose, violet, or white. Cleome is an annual, meaning it grows from seed every year. It will re-seed freely in your garden.
- Gomphrena, or globe amaranth (*Gomphrena globosa*), blooms in a variety of bright colors including purple, orange, red, rose, and pink. Generally, the plant grows 1 to 2 feet tall. This is an old-fashioned flower that is easy to grow. It makes an excellent dried flower that holds its color well. Pick just as the flowers open fully and hang upside down to dry.
- Madagascar periwinkle, also known as annual vinca (*Catharanthus roseus*) is a plant that seems to thrive in hot areas. Its lush, dark green foliage is somewhat glossy and forms a 2-foot tall mound. Annual vinca is available in white, pink, purple, and bicolors. If you have a difficult southern exposure to work with, try this annual. It is slow to start if spring temperatures are cool and it does not tolerate wet areas.
- Threadleaf coreopsis (*Coreopsis verticillata*) is a perennial that will reach 18 to 24 inches in height. It has yellow, daisy-like flowers that last from late spring to late summer. This plant will grow best if planted in a dry, full-sun area.
- Orange coneflower (*Rubdeckia fulgida*) is the perennial form of blackeyed Susan. Its cheery yellow or orange daisy flowers brighten up the August garden.
- Blanket flower (*Gaillardia* species) is a perennial plant available in a variety of hot colors like golden yellow and mahogany red. Cultivars are available in a range of sizes with most growing in the 2-foot height range. Blanket flower tolerates dry soil and temperatures of 90 degrees Fahrenheit or higher.

Reference:

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