



Remember; just say no to "zeroscapes." Take pride in your landscape while enjoying its many benefits. Make xeriscaping your gardening mantra. -- By David Salman

October 2008: Xeriscaping vs. "Zero"-scaping Keeping your Cool with Water Thrifty Landscaping, Part 1 -- By David Salman

Having designed, planted and maintained xeric landscapes in northern New Mexico's high desert climate for the past two decades, I've developed an in-depth understanding and appreciation of xeriscaping. I've also come to see how the principles of xeriscaping, the importance of landscaping to the beauty and value of our properties and the need for landscaping to be an eco-friendly endeavor, fit together. This is **High Country Garden's Style of Xeriscaping**, and it should be the guiding force behind how we all garden, whether it's in an arid region or a region that gets ample rainfall.

It's unfortunate that the word **Xeriscaping** is often mispronounced as "**Zeroscaping**." For most people, this mispronunciation becomes their reality. To them, a xeriscape is no more than a parched, gravel filled yard with a few struggling yuccas or pampas grass clumps stuck into the rocks.

Here in the West, home of the xeriscaping movement, dry conditions and varying degrees of drought are the norm. To conserve water, many towns and cities impose summer watering restrictions, necessitating the need for our landscapes to live on a water budget. There is no "xeric rule" that only low water (xeric) or drought tolerant plants are allowed. You can grow any kind of plant you want in a xeriscape, just don't plant a thirsty lawn or too many water intensive plants or you'll exceed your monthly water budget in the first week.

With **The High Country Gardens Style of Xeriscaping**, you can enhance the beauty, comfort and monetary value of your property with well chosen plants. Thoughtful placement of deciduous trees will shade the south and west sides of our homes and offices to keep the buildings cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter. Combinations of other regionally suitable plants and water use focused on areas of your property where these plants have the most ornamental impact, will keep your water budget intact.

Use water harvesting to direct rain and melted snow run-off from roofs and hard surfaces into the soil around shade trees and planting areas. It's free and it lets nature supplement your landscape's water needs.

Resist the urge to replace thirsty lawn grasses with a hot patch of gravel. Instead, save water and gasoline by using low mow, low water dwarf fescue grass or native turf grasses like buffalo grass and blue grama. In parts of your yard that don't have foot traffic, use herbaceous and woody groundcovers to carpet the area with their cooling foliage.

The greatest hazard of "zeroscaping" is that it adds to the heating of our urban environments. Better known as the "heat island effect," loss of cooling plants has been documented to increase urban temperatures in excess of 20°F. Energy and water use actually increase while causing our cities to become drier without the cloud seeding effects of trees and plants. Remember, just say no to "zeroscapes." Take pride in your landscape while enjoying its many benefits. Make xeriscaping your gardening mantra.

David Salman is the President and Chief Horticulturist at High Country Gardens. In 2008, he was a distinguished recipient of the AMERICAN HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY 2008 Great American Gardeners Award.

November 2008: Xeriscaping vs. “Zero”-scaping, Part II: Getting Started on Your New Xeriscape

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With more and more people wanting to make the change to a Xeric landscape, I have been asked many questions about how to get it done. For example; How do you get started going from a water guzzling landscape to a water conserving one? Where do you begin? How do you know when you’re done? These are all important questions that must be answered if the conversion is to be successful.

Don’t start your conversion by ripping out all your old plants and roto-tilling the lawn. You’ll risk abandoning the project in mid-stream because it becomes overwhelming. Take the time to plan it out. Simplify this big renovation project by breaking it down into smaller projects. Complete each small project before moving on to the next.

In traditional landscapes, the best place to start is downsizing or eliminating with the lawn. Kentucky Blue grass (or other high water) lawns typically soak up 75 % of a landscapes total water use! If you want to keep some or all of the lawn area, replace the high water grass with either the ‘Low Work and Water’ dwarf fescue or a native type turf grass like Legacy™ Buffalo grass or Blue Grama grass.

To conserve water, many homeowners are planting xeric groundcovers instead of grass lawns. There are excellent woody groundcovers like Rhus ‘Autumn Amber’, Genista lydia or creeping junipers that will beautifully cover large areas using far less water and much less maintenance than grass lawns. Plant some groupings of taller flowering shrubs and/or ornamental grasses into these woody groundcovers for additional color, height variation and texture.

Take the opportunity to plant some new flower beds or increase the size of existing ones by appropriating space from the old lawn area. By using xeric perennials, groundcovers and ornamental grasses these flower beds will provide big benefits with greatly decreased water use.

As part of the lawn removal or downsizing, plan to re-work your sprinkler system to water only where there is lawn or groundcover. Flower beds and trees left standing where they used to be surrounded with turf, will need their own irrigation that can be set to water separately from the sprinklers.

In the dry western US, the xeriscape conversion planning process includes designing a new, more water efficient irrigation system. As part of the irrigation system analysis, take the time to study how water that comes off your roof and hard surfaces moves across your landscape. It’s ironic that we do our very best to drain this water off to the street curb only to replace it later with irrigation water. I highly recommend including passive water harvesting (using gravity to move water) as a part of your overall plan to irrigate. Water harvesting and irrigation systems can work well together. (More on this topic in another article.)

Please, resist with all your might, the urge to simply rip out the thirsty grass and replace it with gravel. Take a deep breathe and repeat several times; “I will not zero-scape, I will not zero-scape.”

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