

SEVEN GUIDELINES FOR XERISCAPE

as set by the National Xeriscape Council

Whether old or new, a landscape can be more efficient simply by utilizing the concepts of XERISCAPE type landscaping. The principles are not new. They have been tried and tested by industry professionals over time. XERISCAPE type landscaping is simply a rally word for appropriate horticulture. As such the California Xeriscape Foundation seeks to promote the conservation of water and other natural resources through creative, aesthetically pleasing and efficient landscape design and management. The following principles serve as a basic introduction:

1. Proper planning and design

Developing a landscape plan is the first and most important step to a successful XERISCAPE type landscape. A properly planned XERISCAPE type landscape takes into account the regional and micro-climate conditions of the site to be landscaped, existing vegetation and topographical conditions, the intended use and desires of the property owner, and, most importantly, the zoning or grouping of plant material by their water needs. Developing a landscape plan also allows landscaping to be done over a period of time. Many individuals can develop their own XERISCAPE type landscape plan, but for best results, consult a landscape professional.

2. Appropriate plant selection

Plant selection should be based on the plants' adaptability to the landscape area, desired effect, color, texture, and ultimate plant size. Plants should be arranged to achieve the aesthetic effect desired and, most importantly, grouped in accordance with their respective water needs. Most plants have a place in a XERISCAPE type landscape. Maximum water conservation can be achieved by selecting the appropriate plants that require a minimal amount of supplemental watering. Landscape professionals can be of assistance when selecting plant material.

3. Soil analysis, improvement and conservation

Soils will vary from site to site, and even within a given site. A soil analysis based on random sampling will provide information that will enable proper selection of plants and, if needed, soil amendments. When appropriate, soil amendments can enhance the health and growing capabilities of the landscape by improving water drainage, moisture penetration, and a soil's water holding capacity.

4. Practical Use of plant material

The type and location of turf areas should be selected in the same manner as with all the other plantings. Turf should not be treated as a fill-in material but rather as a major planned element of the landscape. Since many turf varieties require supplemental watering at frequencies different than the other types of landscape plants, turf should be placed so that it can be irrigated separately. While turf areas provide many practical benefits in a landscape, how and where it is used can result in a significant reduction in water use.

5. Efficient irrigation (hydrozones)

Watering only when plants need water and watering deeply encourages deeper root growth resulting in a healthier and more drought tolerant landscape. If a landscape requires regular watering and/or if an irrigation system is desired, the system should be well planned and managed. Water can be conserved through the use of a properly designed irrigation system. Consult landscape and irrigation professionals when planning irrigation for a XERISCAPE type landscape.

6. Use of surface mulches

Mulches applied and maintained at appropriate depths in planting beds will assist soils in retaining moisture, reducing weed growth, and preventing erosion. Mulches can also be used in places where conditions aren't adequate or conducive for growing quality turf or ground covers. Mulches are typically bark chips, wood grindings, pine straws, nutshells, small gravel, and shredded landscape clippings.

7. Efficient maintenance and management, short and long term

Proper landscape and irrigation maintenance will preserve and enhance a quality XERISCAPE type landscape. When the first six principles have been followed, maintenance of a XERISCAPE type landscape is easier and less expensive. In addition, because a XERISCAPE type landscape is healthier and uses a minimum amount of water, less fertilizer, pesticides, and other chemicals are needed to maintain plant material.