7 PRINCIPLES FOR XERISCAPING/WATER-WISE LANDSCAPES

Water conservation through creative landscaping.
What is Xeriscaping, Water-wise or Local-scapes?

They are the fine art of creating a low water and efficient landscape by using plants, irrigation and maintenance that are appropriate to the natural environment.

Xeriscaping is not ZEROSCAPING. Because it uses so much rock and so few of the same plants, zeroscaping tends to be hot and boring.

The term xeriscape is derived from the Greek word, xeros, which means dry.

Local-scapes or Water-wise are also known terms for Xeriscaping and becoming a more readily used.
Well-designed xeriscapes are enchanting and beautiful.

Why choose a water wise landscape over traditional landscape?

Xeriscapes or Waterwise areas aren’t dry and dull.

They use a fraction of the water needed by traditional lawn-dominated landscapes.

Some xeric plants require little or no supplemental watering once they are established.

Xeriscapes require far less ongoing maintenance in the years to come.
Remember we live in the desert

- Utah receives approximately 18”-20” of water per year from Mother Nature.
- Bluegrass typically uses about 28” of water per year. Xeriscapes can use 15” or less per year.
- Older traditional landscapes (pictured) use about 50% of our water consumption.
- Landscapes with lawn areas in them can still be considered water-wise.
The 7 Principles that you apply to any Water Wise/Xeriscape Landscape.

1. Plan and Design
2. Practical Turf Areas
3. Soil and Amendments
4. Efficient Irrigation
5. Proper Plant Section and Installation
6. Mulching
7. Long Term Maintenance

Using the 7 principles of xeriscaping it is possible and definable that everything will work together appropriately.
Proper placement of trees or shrubs in the yard can help reduce heating and cooling cost.

Less use of fertilizers and pesticides help keep our water sources cleaner.

Decreased energy use (and air pollution associated with its generation) because less pumping and treatment of water is required.
Step 1
Planning and Design
Where should you start?

Whether you want to improve/redesign an old landscape or start fresh with a new one, a plan is a must. Consider what you already have in your own yard and with careful planning of your yard to become helps to ensure your long-term success.

**How Will the Landscape Be Used?** If you need an active recreation area where the kids can play, a small turf area may be in order. If what you really want is an “outdoor living room” where you can entertain and enjoy the views, consider expanding your patio area. Maybe it’s a fire pit area or all three areas. The choice is yours.

**What “look” are you most comfortable with?** Your landscape should be what you want it to look like. Pay attention to other landscapes so you can re-create some of their best features in your yard.

**Is Privacy Important to You?** Landscaping can do a marvelous job of shielding your property from the next-door neighbors. On the other hand there may be views you want to enhance.

**Every property has its own “microclimates”** which will affect design and plant choices. For example, the sunny west and south sides of a house typically have warm micro-climates and are well suited for arid, drought-tolerant plants. The cooler north and east sides offer better climates for mini-oasis zones. Select the plants that are best suited to your site’s microclimates.
Grouping plants with similar water needs

Grouping plants into hydro zones is an approach to irrigation and planting design where plants with similar water needs are grouped together. Ideally, each zone of the irrigation system will supply plants with the same water needs with the appropriate amount of water.

Sunny and shady areas in your yard. Do the research and know water use needs of landscape plants. Low, moderate and high use. Plants do not always need to be the most drought tolerant plants.

Consider planting highest water use "oasis" species closest to the house. A lush "oasis" or higher water use zone can be created closer to the house while a more natural area with low water needs could be placed at the back or edges of the property.

Plan the entire landscape all at this time. Adjustments can be implemented throughout the process. You have the option of converting your landscape all at once or in stages.
Draw up a plan. It doesn’t need to be elaborate. Think about mature sizes and shapes. Think about seasonal interest. Think about long term maintenance. Make a wish list of plants that you would like in your yard and group them accordingly on the wish list.

Decide where your keeping the grass. High use areas such as play areas for children and pets. Areas that don’t see a lot of use like side yards, parking strips, back corners and even the front yard are good options for removing lawn and converting the space.

Plan out irrigation. Either new or changes in existing

A good plan will have the measurements of beds, hardscapes and turf areas.

Think about mature height and width of plants. PLAN FOR THE FUTURE.
Step #2

Using Practical Turf Areas

- Keep turf where it makes sense. Look at areas that are not being used or are difficult to maintain.
- Kid/pet playing areas. You’ll want to keep the useable turf there.
- Under a large tree where the grass or older plants are now suffering due to lack of sunlight may be a good conversion to a water-wise zone.
- Slopes. It’s hard to keep the water from running off.
- Park strips, odd shapes or narrow areas, that are difficult to water and dry out quickly.
A mini-oasis in your yard is possible and still be water-wise
Turf in these types of areas are not usable, hard to maintain and water.

Plant for mature sizes. While it looks full when its little, in time as these plants grow, there will not be enough room for all of them.
This landscape was well planned out and works well together.
Think of mature heights and shapes. These plants fit the area and are uniform in shape.
Slope areas can be converted into a terraced low water–wise landscape.
Perennial flowers and ornamental grasses add color to the landscape and there are so many to choose from.
Park strip areas are one of the best places to start converting a traditional landscape into a water-wise landscape.
LEARN FROM THE PROS.

Attending a Local-scapes class offered through the conservation gardens can help guide you through the process. www.centralutahgardens.org
Step #3
Soils and Amendments

- Most urban Utah soils have less than 1% of organic matter naturally.
- Plants only grow as well as the soil allows them to grow. **Healthy soil = Healthy plants**
- Organic matter/compost improves both sandy and clay soils.
- Manure should only be put in at the fall and allowed to set over the winter months.
- Look for drainage issues first.
- Mix compost no more than 1/3 to soil volume.
- If killing out grass and/or weeds in the landscape for conversion. Make sure they are completely killed before. This may take a few applications of weed killer or allowing plastic laid on the ground to suffocate the undesirable weed for awhile. Tilling the soil will also bring more weeds seeds to germinate and may need to be sprayed again. Patience in this process will pay off in the end with less maintenance.
Step #4
Efficient Irrigation

Your new irrigation system should be designed to incorporate your plan’s water zones. Existing irrigation systems can be modified to fit new areas, or make old areas become water wise efficient.

For efficient use of water, turf and other high-water use areas must be irrigated separately from native and xeric plants. Turf lawns are best watered by sprinklers or subsurface irrigation. Trees, shrubs, flowers and groundcovers can be watered efficiently with low-volume drip emitters.

Unfortunately, many irrigation systems are set to water all plants in the landscape at the same time and rate. This approach is wasteful of water.

Utah Water Savers has a rebate for installing a smart controller. CWEL/USU provides water audits and helping you become more water saving conscious. Central Water Conservancy district, Slow the Flow, and more.
• Timing is everything. Know how much water your landscape actually needs before you set your sprinkler.

• Go with a pro. Contractors certified through a QWEL (Quality Water Efficient Landscape Certification) program can audit, install, or maintain your system to ensure water isn’t wasted. Ask for credentials!

• July Green (Pictured): Dormant grass often looks exactly like dead grass. Dormancy doesn’t equal death. Certain bluegrass types of grass shows signs of dormancy at different times.
Don’t water the turf and shrub all on the same irrigation value. Water shrubs and trees on another station with drip emitters.
Step #5
Plant Selection & Proper Installation

• Choose plants that have the same needs.
• Choose healthy plants free from defects. That closeout price may cost you more in the end.
• Plant at the right depth. Not too low, or too high.
• Look for encircling roots. Corrective pruning of roots when installing.
• Plants are not drought tolerant or waterwise until they are established.
• Check the soil if leaf's begin to turn brown or yellow. It may not be a water issue.
Step #6 Mulching

- One of the most important and best things you can do for your plants.
- Mulch is anything that covers the bare ground. In-organic like rock or organic such as bark, colored mulches or even pine needles.
- Mulch needs to be 2”- 4” deep to be effective. No more than 3” in clay soils.
- Weed cloths just don’t work and have negative effects on plant and soil life.
- Don’t pile mulch against the plant/tree stems or trunks.
- Using a combination of Rock and Organic mulches adding interest and color into your landscapes.
Long Term Maintenance

Following the first 6 principles encourages your maintenance hours to decrease in time, helping you become proactive and not reactive because everything is working together.
• Plants don’t always need the amount of water that we think they do.
• Don’t fertilize unless the plant is deficient.
• Don’t prune just because. Let plants grow naturally and prune for health reasons only. Do dead-head perennials to keep them from reseeding.
• Don’t till the soil. This will bring up dormant weed seeds and can hurt the roots of trees and shrubs.
• Check irrigation system every spring and periodically throughout the season. Check filters often.
• Re-mulch areas as needed. Remember not to let in get deeper than 2”-4”
• Stay on top of weeds when they are little. Use pre-emergent.
• Practice IPM.
• Keep a journal and updated plan.
Where to find resources to help you be successful!

- Central Utah Gardens/ centralutahgardens.org
- Utah Water Savers / utahwatersaves.com
- Master Gardeners – USU Extension Office Provo
- Conservation Gardens/ conservationgardenpark.org
- USU Extension/ extensionusu.edu
- CEWL/ cwel.usu.edu
- Red Butte Gardens/ redbuttegarden.org
- Water Wise Plants / waterwiseplants.utah.gov
- Water Wise Utah / waterwiseutah.org
- Slow the Flow / slowtheflow.org
- Local Garden Centers
- Landscapers – Reputable and references
- Local Irrigation/Sprinkler Companies
- Ogden Botanical Gardens/ ogdenbotanicalgardens.org
- Sego Lily Gardens - Sandy
- Weber Water Basin/Gardens - weberbasin.com/conservation