Xeriscaping

What is xeriscaping?

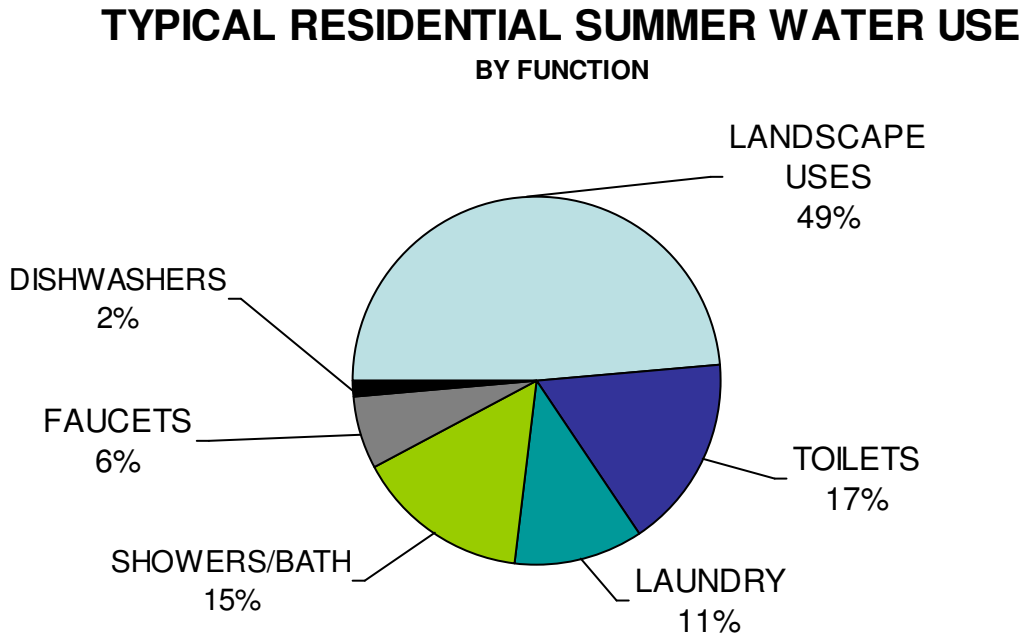
Literally, the word xeriscaping comes from a combination of two other words: "xeri" derived from the Greek word "xeros" for dry; and "scape", meaning a kind of view or scene. While xeriscape translates to mean "dry scene," in practice xeriscaping means simply landscaping with slow-growing, drought tolerant plants to conserve water and reduce yard trimmings.

What xeriscaping is NOT.

- Xeriscape is NOT dry Only.
- Xeriscape is NOT just rocks and gravel.
- Xeriscape is NOT necessarily lawn-less landscaping.
- Xeriscape is NOT native plants only.
- Xeriscape is NOT a boring mono-culture of spiny plants.

Benefits of xeriscaping

For most of the western United States over fifty percent of residential water used is applied to landscape and lawns. This statistic is also true in Salina as seen by the cities' water use below. Xeriscape can reduce water use by 60% or more.



In addition to conserving water, xeriscaping:

- Provides attractive planting options.
- Minimizes pests and disease.
- Thrives with little fertilization.
- Is low maintenance.
- Saves valuable landfill space and money.

Xeriscaping is more than simply planting drought tolerant plants; it is a system with 7 fundamental components or principals. Listed below are the 7 principals of xeriscaping:

- Plan and Design
- Create Practical Turf Areas
- Select Low Water Plants
- Use Soil Amendments
- Use Mulches
- Irrigate Efficiently
- Maintain the Landscape Properly

Plan and Design

Xeriscaping should be designed around three main elements; sun, function/views, and time/resources. First, the xeriscaping designer needs to understand how the sun will affect the types of plants that are selected. Some plants require large amounts of sun to thrive, while others are more conducive located in the shade. Knowing how the sun affects the selected plants is important when choosing planting locations. Plants that require large amounts of sunlight need to be planted in open areas where they are not shaded, while plants that require less sunlight need to be located in the shade of larger plants or trees.

Second, the function and view of the landscape is important. What is the function of the landscaping? If the purpose of the landscaping is to provide shade for an area, then larger plants and trees need to be planted in a location to offer the proper amount of shade at the appropriate time of day without obstructing any desired views. If the function of the landscaping is offer interesting color, than plants with specific color and blooming periods need to be selected to achieve this purpose. If the function is to provide an

aesthetic view or screening between adjacent properties, plants need to be selected that will grow to the desired height and density to fulfill this purpose. The function needs to be at the forefront of the designer's mind when choosing planting types and locations. Plants need to be selected that achieve the desired affect whether it be, screening, protecting, shading or creating a visual accent.

The third and final element is time and resources. When developing a xeriscaping planting plan, resources need to be considered. One of the goals to proper xeriscape design is to select plantings that serve their purpose with the use of very little additional resources. This means that plants should be as self sustainable as possible with the least amount human intervention and maintenance. While maintenance is still required, the idea is to place selected plants in areas that will require a minimal amount of water, fertilizer, herbicide, pesticide or time and maintenance.

Create Practical Turf Areas

No other form of landscaping is more resource intensive than turf grass. Most turf grass areas require constant water, fertilizer, herbicide, pesticide and mowing. To minimize the capital allocated to turf area, xeriscaping focuses on reducing turf areas to fit the families/businesses needs, with all excess turf grass removed. Limiting the size of the turf grass area reduces the water and time needed to maintain the lawn. In addition to limiting the size of turf areas, xeriscaping advocates replacing water thirsty bluegrasses with tolerant grasses like Buffalo, Bermuda, and Blue Grama grasses.

Select Plants Conducive to the Native Environment

Xeriscaping requires the selection of plants that are drought tolerant and fit the specific purpose of the landscaping. Since xeriscaping focuses on minimizing the resources used, selected plants should be conducive to the local climate and soils as well as resistant to native pests. Plants should be selected and grouped together in irrigation zones with plants that have similar water needs.

Use Soil Amendments

Soil components must be tested prior to the design and plant selection of a xeriscape area. The components of the soil dictate which kind of plants will thrive and which kind will fail. If the designer has already selected specific plants that do not usually fair well in the soil components located on the xeriscaping site, adding amendments before planting the plants will help the soil retain water and offer the appropriate nutrients needed for the selected plants. Landscaping with native plants may make amendments unnecessary.

Use Mulches

Mulches are beneficial to xeriscape areas in many ways. Mulches cover the soil keeping the soil cool, minimizing evaporation. This reduces the water resources needed to maintain the xeriscaping. In addition, mulches reduce weed growth and slow erosion.

There are several types of organic materials that can be recycled and used for mulches. The best mulches are organic mulches because they also offer the benefit of regenerating the soil with nutrients during decomposition. Organic mulches include bark chips, wood grindings, pine needles, and composted turf grass clippings.

DO NOT use plastic under the mulch. It is a common mistake to install plastic liner underneath mulch to prevent weeds from growing. This has several negative affects. First, the plastic greatly reduces the amount of water that the soil is exposed to during watering which causes areas where holes exist to become over watered and areas covered in plastic to be under watered. Second, the plastic also reduces the regenerating affect that organic mulches offer during decomposition. Instead of the decomposed nutrients percolating into the soil, they remain on the surface of the plastic creating a new layer of rich soil prime for weeds and unwanted plants to germinate. The end result is a weed infested landscape thriving from a nutrient rich soil layer, while the main soil base is slowly being depleted of necessary nutrients due to the lack of percolating nutrients, all because of the plastic.

Irrigate Efficiently

A well planned irrigation system can greatly reduce the amount of water used. The key to irrigation efficiency is developing irrigation zones. Plants should be grouped into cohorts of similar watering needs. Low-water plants should be grouped together, with medium-water plants group together and so on. Zoned irrigation systems allow the delivery of the most appropriate amount of water necessary without over or under watering. This is most effective when a xeriscape has components of turf grass areas and low-water plantings.

Maintain the Landscape Properly

While one of the benefits of xeriscaping is the reduced maintenance, all forms of landscaping still need maintenance. Low maintenance is not “no maintenance”. It is still necessary to keep the xeriscape healthy with well-timed mowing, fertilizing, pruning, pest control, and weeding. It is also, important to keep the irrigation system properly adjusted. A little maintenance on the front end will save time, money, and resources in the long run and will lead to some great looking landscapes.