

# xer·i·scape™

\ˈzɪr-ə-skāp\ n. [Greek *xeros*, *dry*]:

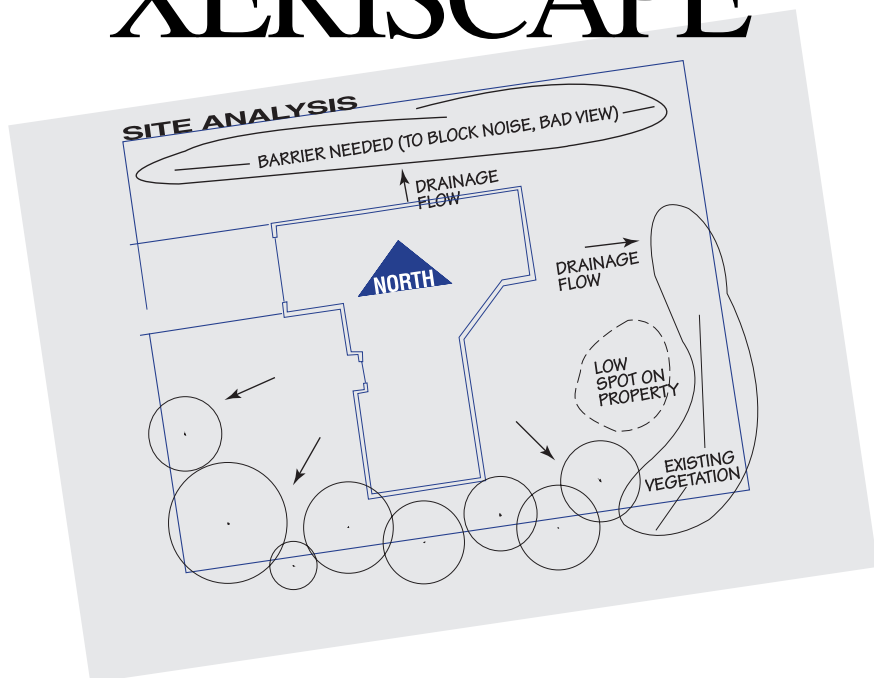
water conservation through creative landscaping

**P**reserving Florida's valuable fresh water resources through water conservation is becoming more and more important. Outdoor irrigation can account for 50 percent or more of the average homeowner's water use. A water-conserving Xeriscape will save money on water, energy, and maintenance bills and will help preserve the state's valuable fresh water resources.

*Xeriscape originated in the arid western United States. Contrary to the image of rock and cactus gardens, Florida Xeriscape resembles lush traditional gardens. Through careful planning they use 30 to 80 percent less irrigation water.*



# Seven Steps to a Successful XERISCAPE™



## 1 DESIGN

Careful designing is crucial to the long-term enjoyment and success of a Xeriscape. A Xeriscape should be designed to complement your lifestyle and activities.

A planned Xeriscape can be installed in phases, minimizing the initial investment.

There are two principle elements to a Xeriscape design: **the site analysis and the planting plan**. The site analysis shows existing conditions such as slope, drainage, north-south orientation and the location of existing native vegetation, thriving plants and permanent structures. The planting plan illustrates the placement of plant beds, grass, paths and driveways, and includes a list of new plants to be installed. Consider increasing shade areas to decrease water needs of plants.

# 2

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## ANALYZE THE SOIL

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Florida soils are **mostly sand** with very little ability to absorb or hold water. Adding organic matter to the soil improves its water retention. However, due to Florida's high humidity and temperatures, organic matter breaks down rapidly, thus limiting the duration of effectiveness.

Flower and vegetable gardens which are continually replanted benefit from the repeated addition of organic matter, such as homemade compost, packaged peat-manure or topsoil. Planting native or adapted plants in the right soil may eliminate the need for soil improvements. Information about making improvements to your soil is available from your County Cooperative Extension Service Office.

# 3

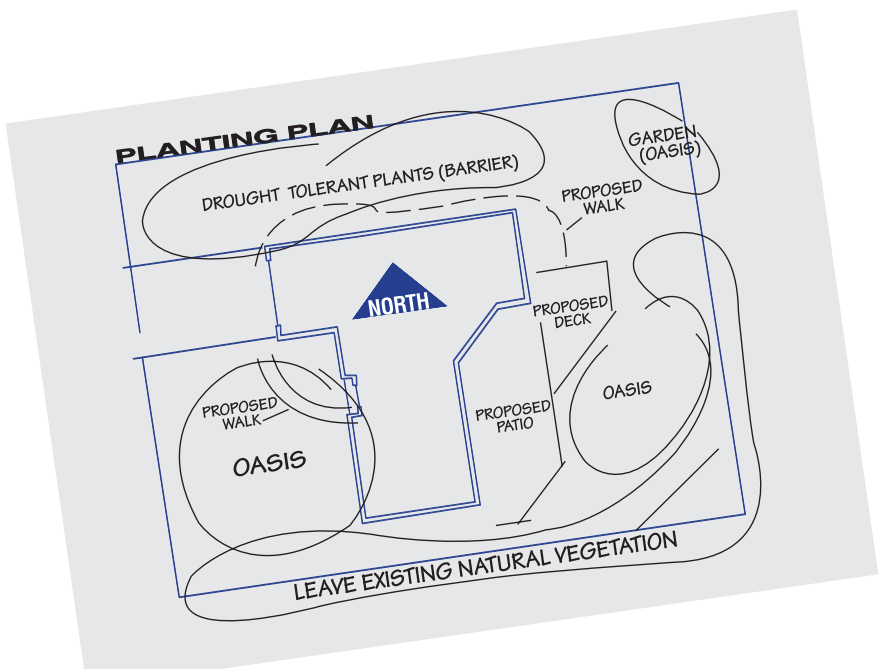
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## PLANT SELECTION

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Putting the right plant in the right spot is the key to a successful Xeriscape. Begin by selecting plants appropriate for the soil and other conditions in your yard. Next, cluster plants according to their sunlight and water needs. Plant lists from *Waterwise Florida Landscapes*, a publication available from Florida's five regional water management districts, can help you start your selection process. **Landscape "zones"**— areas with plants having similar irrigation and maintenance requirements — are determined by the planting plan and site analysis. The three zones are:

**Natural Zones** - Areas where plants survive on natural rainfall. Native plants have adapted to the wet and dry extremes of the Florida climate and many can thrive in full sun with no irrigation. Some cultivated plants have also adapted to these conditions. When planted in shade, many more cultivated plants will succeed. A few natives will do well in normally wet areas. Review your site analysis to identify plants that have adapted and will continue to do well.



***Drought-tolerant Zones*** - Plants in these areas are native and cultivated species. They are able to survive extended periods without rainfall or supplemental irrigation. There will be brief periods when watering is necessary.

***Oasis Zones*** - Oasis plants require frequent irrigation and should be grouped together. Grouping eliminates the need to water the entire landscape at their required rate. A typical oasis zone might be the entryway, the grass areas, or flower, fruit or vegetable gardens. Remember, these plants are normally placed in the full sun and if used under shade trees they may be drought tolerant.

# 4

## USE TURF WISELY

Grass areas are part of an oasis zone. Grass tends to use **more water** and require **more maintenance** than any other part of the landscape. Therefore, grass should be limited to areas used for recreation and leisure as much as possible. Other grass sections should be minimized and shaped for maximum ease of mowing, edging and watering. Consider alternatives to grass such as attractive ground cover plantings, or decks, patios and walkways made of permeable materials.

# 5

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## IRRIGATE EFFICIENTLY

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**Grouping plants** according to their water needs **maximizes irrigation efficiency**. Oasis zones are irrigated separately from drought-tolerant zones, and natural zones do not require irrigation. Select correct irrigation heads for the type of plants being watered. For example, a spray system works well for lawns, but drip, bubbler or microsprinkler systems are more appropriate for trees and shrubbery. These types of irrigation heads enable water to be applied only to the root system with minimal evaporation. Weekly inspection of the system is very important. Broken parts may need repairing and spray heads may need to be aligned to keep from watering pavement. Additional conservation tips are:

- *reduce irrigation during the rainy summer and dormant winter;*
- *use rain gauges and a rain shut-off device to avoid over-watering; and*
- *irrigate during early morning hours when evaporation is minimal.*

*Note: Your county may have a landscape ordinance requiring specific irrigation requirements. Always be sure to follow local ordinance(s) and restrictions.*

# 6

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## USE MULCHES

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A **2 to 3 inch layer of mulch** minimizes evaporation from the soil, reduces weeds, moderates soil temperature and slows erosion. Mulched beds are an attractive alternative to grass and help accent design features. Organic mulches include shredded or chipped bark, pine needles and oak leaves. Inorganic mulches, such as stone or gravel, can be used but only in small amounts. The weight of the stones and the heat they will hold may not benefit your plants. Place the mulch directly on the soil and leave a 1 to 2 inch space between the base of the plant and the mulch. This space prevents the stem from rotting. Information about selecting mulch and using it in your landscape is available from your County Cooperative Extension Service Office.

# 7

## PRACTICE PROPER MAINTENANCE

Xeriscapes, by design, reduce the expense and time required for garden maintenance. **Proper maintenance will protect the beauty of the Xeriscape and enhance the water savings.** Two common maintenance mistakes are over-watering and over-fertilizing. Over-watering increases water bills, disease and insect control expenses, and plant replacement costs. Over-fertilizing promotes fast but weak growth which makes plants vulnerable to freezes and possible breakage in high winds. Excessive growth also increases the amount of water the plant needs. Two maintenance practices which reduce the amount of water needed are:

- *raise the lawn mower blade(s) to get a higher cut. This encourages grass roots to grow deeper, making the grass more drought-tolerant; and*
- *prune plants to the desired shape and remove diseased parts. This encourages healthy growth, prevents the plant from becoming overgrown, and keeps its water needs at a minimum.*

Information about landscape maintenance and other yard specifics is available from your County Cooperative Extension Service Office.

*Coral Honeysuckle*



*Gold Mound Lantana*

*Azalea*



# DROUGHT TOLERANT PLANTS

			Full Sun	Partial Sun	Shade
			☉	☼	☚
Trees	native	<i>Pines</i>	✓		
		<i>Oaks</i>	✓		
		<i>Southern Red Cedar</i>	✓		
		<i>American Holly</i>	✓	✓	
		<i>Dahoon Holly</i>	✓	✓	
		<i>Yaupon Holly</i>	✓	✓	✓
		<i>Flowering Dogwood</i>	✓	✓	✓
	cultivated	<i>Weeping Elm</i>	✓		
	<i>Tangerine</i>	✓			
Palms	native	<i>Cabbage Palm</i>	✓	✓	
		<i>Paurotis Palm</i>	✓	✓	
		<i>Saw Palmetto</i>	✓	✓	
		<i>Needle Palm</i>		✓	✓
	cultivated	<i>Washington Palm</i>	✓		
		<i>Phoenix Palm</i>	✓		
		<i>Lady Palm</i>		✓	✓
		<i>Bamboo Palm</i>	✓	✓	✓
	<i>Windmill Palm</i>	✓	✓		
Shrubs	native	<i>Firebush</i>	✓	✓	✓
		<i>Simpson Stopper</i>	✓	✓	
		<i>Fetter Bush</i>	✓	✓	
		<i>Walter's Viburnum</i>	✓	✓	
		<i>Wax Myrtle</i>	✓	✓	
	cultivated	<i>Oleander</i>	✓		
		<i>Chinese Juniper</i>	✓		
		<i>Azalea hybrids</i>		✓	
		<i>Indian Hawthorn</i>		✓	
		<i>Cape Jasmine Gardenia</i>	✓		
Ground Covers	native	<i>Beach Sunflower</i>	✓		
		<i>Wild Petunia</i>	✓		
		<i>Muhly Grass</i>		✓	
	cultivated	<i>Purple Queen</i>	✓	✓	
		<i>Shore Junipers</i>	✓		
		<i>Gold Mound Lantana</i>	✓		
		<i>Cast Iron Plant</i>		✓	✓
Vines	native	<i>Yellow Jessamine</i>	✓	✓	
		<i>Coral Honeysuckle</i>	✓	✓	
	cultivated	<i>Mandevilla</i>	✓		
		<i>Confederate Jasmine</i>	✓	✓	

## **For Additional Information**

For other water resources information, including the *Waterwise Florida Landscapes* booklet, contact the Southwest Florida Water Management District at 1-800-423-1476, or visit our Web site at [WaterMatters.org](http://WaterMatters.org).

## **County Cooperative Extension Service Offices:**

### **Charlotte County**

6900 Florida St.  
Punta Gorda, FL 33950-5799  
(941) 639-6255

### **Citrus County**

3600 S. Florida Ave.  
Inverness, FL 34450-7369  
(352) 726-2141

### **DeSoto County**

P.O. Box 310  
Arcadia, FL 34265-0310  
(863) 993-4846

### **Hardee County**

507 Civic Center Dr.  
Wauchula, FL 33873-9460  
(941) 773-2164

### **Hernando County**

194960 Oliver St.  
Brooksville, FL 34601  
(352) 754-4433

### **Highlands County**

4509 W. George Blvd.  
Sebring, FL 33875  
(863) 402-6540

### **Hillsborough County**

5339 County Rd. 579  
Seffner, FL 33584  
(813) 744-5519

### **Lake County**

30205 State Road 19  
Tavares, FL 32778-4052  
(352) 343-4101

### **Levy County**

P.O. Box 219  
Bronson, FL 32621-0219  
(352) 486-5131

### **Manatee County**

1303 17th St. W.  
Palmetto, FL 34221  
(941) 722-4524

### **Marion County**

2232 N.E. Jacksonville Rd.  
Ocala, FL 34470-3615  
(352) 620-3440

### **Pasco County**

36702 S.R. 52 W.  
Dade City, FL 33525  
(352) 521-4288

### **Pinellas County**

12175 125th St. N.  
Largo, FL 33774-3695  
(727) 582-2100

### **Polk County**

1702 Highway 17 S.  
Bartow, FL 33831-9005  
(863) 533-0765

### **Sarasota County**

2900 Ringling Blvd.  
Sarasota, FL 34237  
(941) 316-1000

### **Sumter County**

P.O. Box 218  
67 County Road 538  
Bushnell, FL 33513  
(352) 793-2728

**Southwest Florida**  
*Water Management District*



The District does not discriminate upon the basis of any individual's disability status. Anyone requiring reasonable accommodation under the ADA should contact the Communications and Community Affairs Department at (352) 796-7211 or 1-800-423-1476 (FL only); TDD: 1-800-231-6103 (FL only).



# Seven Steps to a Successful XERISCAPE™

## 1 Design

There are two principle elements to a Xeriscape design: the site analysis and the planting plan.

- Group plants with similar water requirements.
- Increase shade areas to decrease the water needs of plants.
- Preserve areas of native vegetation.

## 2 Analyze the Soil

- Add organic matter to flower or vegetable gardens before planting to increase the water retention ability of the soil.

## 3 Plant Selection

- Select plants appropriate for the soil.
- Natural zone plants require only natural rainfall.
- Drought-tolerant zone plants require minimal irrigation.
- Oasis zone plants require frequent watering. Limit these areas as much as possible.

## 4 Use Turf Wisely

- Consolidate area or consider alternatives to ease maintenance and water requirements.

## 5 Irrigate Efficiently

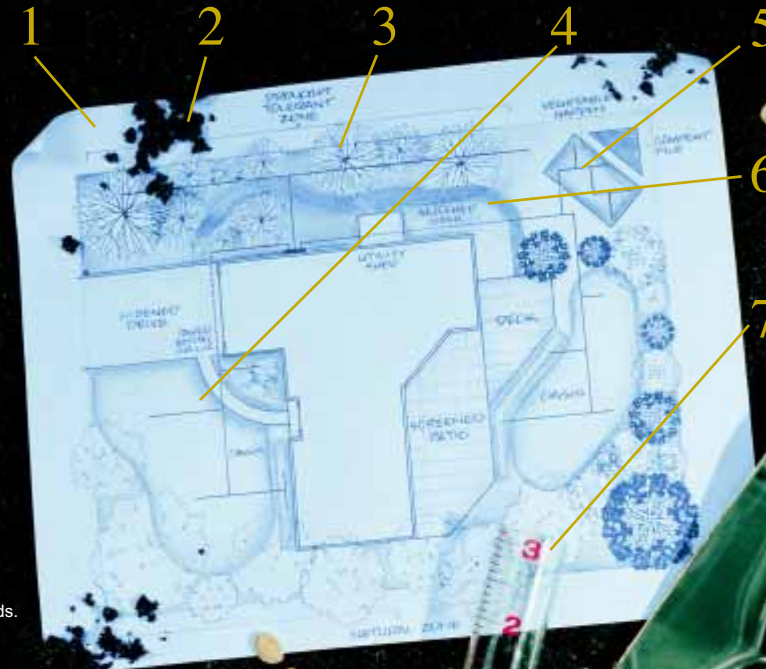
- Set the time on each irrigation zone to correspond to the needs of the plants grouped within that zone.
- Check the system weekly to insure it is operating properly.

## 6 Mulches

- Use mulches for walkways as well as within the planting beds.
- Mulches reduce watering needs, weeds, erosion, etc.

## 7 Maintenance

- Water and fertilize plants only as needed. Excessive amounts promote pest problems and increases pruning and mowing requirements.
- Raise lawn mower blade(s) to promote more extensive root growth.
- Prune shrubs to natural height and shape.



Southwest Florida  
Water Management District

Request a free copy of *WaterWise Florida Landscapes* and learn more about landscaping to promote water conservation using the principles of Xeriscape.

For this and other water-related information, contact the Southwest Florida Water Management District at 1-800-423-1476 (Florida only), or visit our Web site at [WaterMatters.org](http://WaterMatters.org).

