

# XERISCAPE™

Plan the Soil, Plants, Grass and Mulch and Water to Maintain

Xeriscaping protects one of our most important natural resources – water. *Xeri* comes from the Greek word *xeros*, which means dry. Xeriscape landscaping typically uses plants that need or tolerate dry (xeric) conditions. It also emphasizes minimal use of fertilizers and pesticides. Because Xeriscape landscapes do not require a great deal of care, considerable money and time can be saved. Xeriscaping will enable you to establish and maintain an environmentally healthy and attractive landscape. Xeriscaping is an approach to landscaping that uses seven underlying principles that can be reflected in one simple statement:

**Plan the Soil, Plants, Grass and Mulch and Water to Maintain.**

## Match-Making

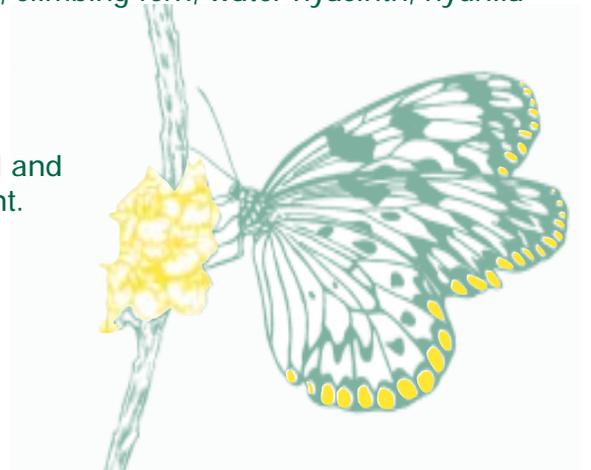
Matching the right plant to the right place is the key to Xeriscaping. If there is a secret to Xeriscaping, it is the use of native plants. Plants native to Florida have adapted to surviving in extended wet and then dry weather conditions. Matching site conditions with plants that thrive in those conditions is the key. When match-making is successful, plants will need little help to survive and even flourish. Using the right plants will enable you to minimize the use of water, fertilizer, pesticide and labor and also will reduce the amount of pollutants that are carried into the nearest water body when it rains or when watering.

## The Wrong Plants

There has been an increasing problem throughout the State of Florida and that is the spread of exotic or invasive plants. Many of these species were first introduced because of their ornamental appearance. Because they are not native, they often have no natural checks or balances. Some of these plants are prohibited and are now illegal to plant according to Florida law. In our area of the state, some of the exotic plants to be avoided include kudzu, climbing fern, water hyacinth, hydrilla and Chinese tallow (or popcorn) tree.

## Florida Law

Florida law makes the planting of some exotic species illegal and promotes the use of Xeriscape concepts for state government. Local governments also are encouraged to use Xeriscape landscaping practices.



# The 7 principles of XERISCAPE

Plan the Soil, Plants, Grass and Mulch and Water to Maintain.

## 1. Plan and Design

One of the most important steps is to plan your landscape design. First assess the topography and determine drainage patterns. Examine your site conditions and pinpoint both shady and sunny areas. Decide whether any of the existing vegetation should be preserved. Project growing patterns so that this is taken into consideration in your plan. Do not forget to locate underground cables or telephone and power lines. Decide which areas you would like to develop for a view or areas where you would like the focus to be on privacy. Do you want your landscape to be formal or informal? Do you want to attract wildlife? Make a drawing of your landscape plan. Your plan should take advantage of what you already have available to you.

## 2. Assess the Soil

Analyze your soil before beginning your landscaping project. It is always best to select plants that are more suited to existing soil conditions. Keep in mind that "fill" may have been brought in for your home and might not reflect the area's natural soil type. Determine the pH level (acid, neutral or alkaline) of your soil. Most plants prefer a soil that is neutral or just slightly acidic. Where you live may determine the pH of your soil. Coastal areas may be more alkaline due to the presence of salt or shells. Some plants, such as azaleas, need acidic soil. While soil can be improved by using organic materials such as peat or compost, soil type is difficult to change over the long-term and it is always a good rule to select plants that do well in the type of soil that you have.

## 3. Select the Right Plants

Select different plants for different areas of the landscape. Place plants that like well-drained areas, sun or shade in areas where their preferences can be met. Plan for both the short-term as well as the long-term and place plants according to changes that may be anticipated over time. Always group plants according to their water needs. Think in terms of zones – natural, drought tolerant or oasis. In a natural zone, plants will have adapted to wet or dry extremes and regular watering will not be necessary once they are established. In a drought-tolerant zone, plants can survive for long periods of time without watering. In an oasis zone, plants may require watering depending on the amount of rainfall.





## 4. Use Grass Wisely

Grass or turf may play a useful role in your Xeriscape landscape if it is the right kind of grass or turf for the area in which it is planted. Use it wisely since it requires more maintenance and more water than other areas of your landscape. Grass can be planted in selected areas of your landscape to create play areas for children or for erosion control in some areas. Do not overfertilize your lawn and be sure to use a slow-release fertilizer. It also is best to cut your grass at the highest setting on your lawn mower to reduce the need for water. A higher height also encourages your grass to develop a healthier root system. Leaving grass clippings on the lawn when you mow reduces the need for both water and fertilizer.



## 5. Apply Mulch

Mulching helps conserve water. Mulch helps retain the moisture in the soil reducing the need for watering. It adds nutrients to the soil when it decomposes, shades the soil from direct sunlight, prevents soil erosion, reduces weeds and reduces maintenance and upkeep. Suggested mulches can be bark chips, pine needles or leaves. Gravel and colored rocks will not hold moisture and will radiate heat around your plants. Always mulch about two to four inches deep and several inches from the stem areas to reduce the possibility of rotting.



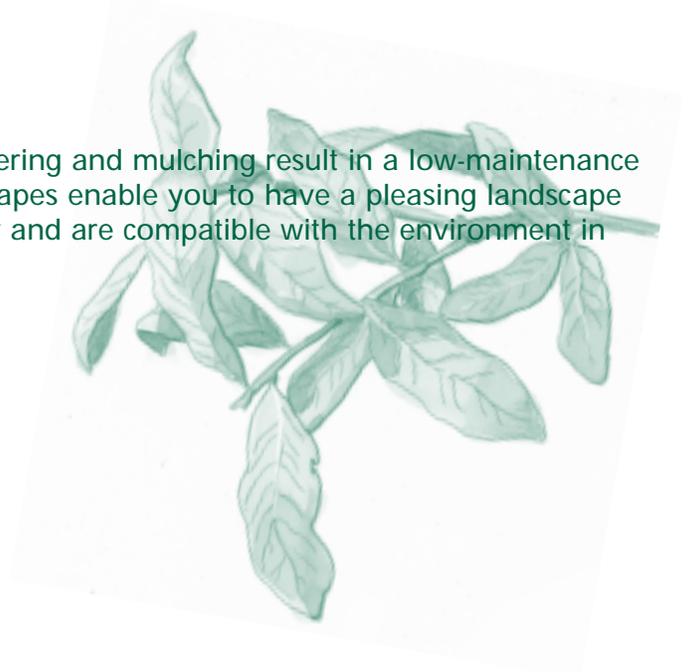
## 6. Water Efficiently

Water or irrigate efficiently to be effective. Water slowly to prevent water from running off and water long enough to reach the root systems. If you plan to use an irrigation system, select the most efficient one for your landscape whether it is a pop-up sprinkler, drip, bubbler or micro-irrigation system. According to Florida law, any irrigation system that has been installed after January of 1991 must have a rain sensor shut-off switch which overrides the system when adequate rainfall has occurred.



## 7. Maintain

Proper planning, plant selection, watering and mulching result in a low-maintenance landscape. Low-maintenance landscapes enable you to have a pleasing landscape that saves you both time and money and are compatible with the environment in which you live.



This document is designed to give you a brief overview and introduction to the principles of Xeriscape landscaping. More detailed information can be obtained from Florida's water management districts. Other water conservation brochures that are available online or from the Northwest Florida Water Management District include: *50 Ways to Save Water*, *Watering Wisely* and *Retro Fit It*. Copies may be obtained by contacting



This document has been produced by the Northwest Florida Water Management District's Office of Public Information to provide information on Xeriscape landscaping to conserve water.

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For local information contact: