

Xeriscaping: Landscaping Nature's Way

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Anyone who has returned home from a weeklong vacation to dead or wilted plants or has had to carry buckets of water to outlying flower beds can understand the importance of developing a well thought out landscape design. As the snow is melting and yards are drying out, homeowners are starting to think about their summer backyard projects. An important concept to include in backyard creation or renovation is water efficiency. **Xeriscaping is a term used to describe landscaping that strives for efficient water use.** This term was coined in the 1980s by the City of Denver as they faced drought conditions and an exorbitant amount of water was being used to water tame grass lawns that were not adapted to the climate of Colorado.

The idea of landscaping with plants that are adapted to the local climate and soil conditions offers homeowners the option to use less water and provides year-round beauty. Some of the benefits to xeriscaping include decreasing the need for supplemental irrigation, providing habitat for wildlife, reducing storm water runoff, and decreasing the need for mowing. There are seven principles of xeriscaping:

- Develop a plan and landscape design
- Soil analysis
- Appropriate plant selection
- Practical turf areas
- Efficient irrigation
- Use mulch
- Practice regular maintenance

Selected Plants Suitable for Xeriscaping Projects

Very Low Water Use	
Blazing Star/Gayfeather	<i>Liatris</i> spp.
Prairie Coneflower	<i>Echinacea angustifolia</i>
Blue Grama	<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i>
Rugosa Rose	<i>Rosa rugosa</i>
Amur Maple	<i>Acer ginnala</i>
Low Water Use	
Bee Balm/Wild Bergamot	<i>Monarda</i> spp.
Black-eyed Susan	<i>Rudbeckia hirta</i>
Little Bluestem	<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>
Black Chokeberry	<i>Photinia melanocarpa</i>
Ohio Buckeye	<i>Aesculus glabra</i>
Moderate Water Use	
Daylily	<i>Hemerocallis</i> spp.
Butterfly Weed	<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>
Penstemon	<i>Penstemon</i> spp.
Indian Grass	<i>Sorghastrum nutans</i>
Nanking Cherry	<i>Prunus tomentosa</i>

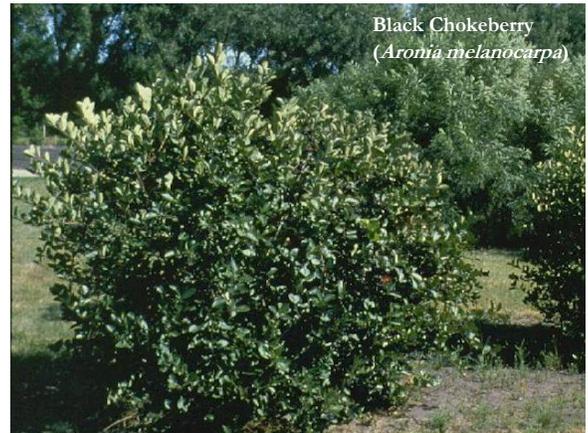
When designing a landscape plan it is beneficial to group plants based on their water requirements. With plants appropriate for xeriscaping there are three basic zones: very low water use, low water use, and moderate water use. Moderate water use plants should be the closest to the house or other source of water and the more drought tolerant plants should be the furthest away.

In our region of the country there are many beautiful, hardy plant species to pick from when considering a low maintenance, water efficient landscape. It is important to remember that xeriscaping does not mean vast expanses of rock mulch or fields of cacti or juniper. There are many native plants adapted to our climate including a wide variety of grasses, wildflowers, and shrubs.



One shrub species to consider including in a xeriscape plan is Black Chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*). This shrub is in the Rose family. It remains small in size (3'-6') and lacks thorns. In the spring small white flowers bloom in abundant clusters and last about 3 weeks. During late summer, each fertilized flower is replaced by a black leathery fruit containing several small seeds. The fruit is extremely tart and bitter, though it can be used in jams or jellies. The fall foliage colors are bright yellow, red, and orange.

Black Chokeberry is tolerant of many growing conditions. It will grow in partial shade, but thrives in full sun. This shrub is tolerant of a wide range of soils and moisture conditions, including very dry. Black Chokeberry provides excellent wildlife habitat as cover and works well as a food source for a variety of birds. Contact your local nursery to purchase this shrub and other plant selections for your landscaping needs.



Black Chokeberry
(*Aronia melanocarpa*)