

XERISCAPE™ LANDSCAPING



Common Questions and Misconceptions

I have an established landscape that I enjoy. Can I still use Xeriscape principles?

Yes! You can still save water by applying many of the Xeriscape landscaping principles to an existing landscape. In fact, regular maintenance is crucial in any landscape. For example, you can regularly check your irrigation system for leaks and repair them as soon as possible, replenish mulch, and use proper pruning and mowing techniques. These and other measures discussed in the Southwest Water Management District's Xeriscape materials will increase your landscape's efficiency and beauty.

I've designed my landscape and am ready to design and install my irrigation system. Who should I call?

Most Florida telephone books offer listings of companies and/or individuals who design and install irrigation systems. It's important that you select one that can meet all of your needs. One valuable source of information is the Florida Irrigation Society (FIS), which can provide a list of irrigation contractors licensed or certified in Florida. FIS has also developed a brochure titled "Know Your Irrigation Contractor." You can contact the FIS at P.O. Box 1627, Goldenrod, FL 32722, or by calling 1-800-441-5341.

I like the idea of saving water through creative landscaping, but deed restrictions require certain amounts and types of grass and other plants. What should I do?

You can use Xeriscape principles in planning, designing and installing your landscape. However, local requirements may restrict your flexibility in selecting plants and your creativity of design. Principles such as planning and maintaining an efficient irrigation system will become more important to your situation. Unfortunately, the landscape requirements of many cities and planned developments were designed only for simplicity, uniformity and vehicular safety. You may consider working with your community to amend the existing requirements to allow for creativity, efficiency, and conservation of resources.

My neighbor told me that only certain plants can be used in a Xeriscape landscape and that I shouldn't plant azaleas. Is that true?

No! Any plant can work in a Xeriscape landscape as long as it is in its

appropriate environment. Xeriscape principles recommend that, when selecting plants for your landscape, you consider the existing characteristics of the intended plant location. If you want to plant azaleas, for example, select a location that offers some shade and soil that is moist, organic and acidic. If irrigated, these plants should be placed and irrigated with plants that have similar water needs. The key is to select plants that are suitable to your existing site characteristics and to put them in the right place.

I like the idea of using mulch because of its many benefits. What kinds of mulches are available other than cypress?

Most nurseries offer pine nuggets, and some offer mulches made of exotics such as melaleuca or eucalyptus. There also are many alternatives to bagged mulch and they are free! Consider using yard waste, such as grass clippings, pine needles and shredded leaves. Many municipal landfills offer mulch. It will include a chip-and-bark mixture from a variety of different plants, but it, too, is usually free. Not as pristine as bagged mulch, it performs the same functions. Although not considered as beneficial to the landscape as organic mulches, you may wish to consider inorganics, such as stones, cloth and plastic.

My landscape has been established and has been thriving for years. Now that reclaimed water is available, I'd like to use it but I am concerned about the effect on my plants.

Reclaimed water will most likely not affect your landscape any differently than any other water source. Keep in mind, however, that all reclaimed water is not the same. Contact your reclaimed water provider to determine the levels of minerals, such as salts, in your reclaimed water. Some landscape plants are salt-tolerant but others are not. In addition to reclaimed water, other techniques that use non-potable water sources include cisterns, rain barrels and other water harvesting practices.

How can I get ideas for my Xeriscape landscape?

There are several Xeriscape demonstration sites within the Southwest Florida Water Management District. If you don't have a brochure listing them, call 1-800-423-1476. At some of the sites, you may be able to take a self-guided tour. At others, such as the District offices or the Florida House, it may be possible to schedule group tours or a Xeriscape presentation.





Where can I get a device that turns my automatic irrigation system off when it's raining? My builder told me I must have one.

Your builder is right. Since 1991, everyone is required to install an automatic rain shut-off device on all new in-ground irrigation systems. This is to avoid wasting water by irrigating when it's raining heavily, and it frees you from having to manually control your system when it's raining. You can purchase one of these devices in the irrigation section of most hardware and home-improvement stores. You can elect to install it yourself or have a professional contractor do the work. The devices are designed to override the irrigation system when it rains without interfering with the programmed irrigation schedule.

I want to set my automatic irrigation system timer. How do I know how often to water the lawn?

Most lawns need an average of 1 to 1 1/2 inches of water a week in the summer months and about 1/2 to 3/4 inch of water per week in the cooler winter months, if it hasn't rained. Test each zone of your irrigation system to see how long it takes for the appropriate amount of water to be distributed. For example, if it takes 10 minutes for 1/2 inch of water to be applied in a zone, you can schedule that zone for 10 minutes once per week in the winter and for 10 to 15 minutes twice per week in the summer. Irrigate at this rate and pay attention to your grass, making slight adjustments as needed. It's a good idea to monitor a rain gauge in your yard to avoid watering if enough rain has fallen.

The last principle of Xeriscape is regular maintenance, which, for me, includes some mowing. How often should I mow my grass, and how high should I set the blade?

When mowing your lawn, set the blade to mow at about a 3-inch height. This allows the grass to develop a deeper root system. If you mow lower, the grass blade is not big enough to provide the nutrients that the roots needs, and a shallow root system can develop. Grass with a shallow root system is more susceptible to pests and drought. Remove only about 1 inch of grass blade each time you mow. One inch of grass quickly decomposes and returns nutrients to the soil —preventing you from having to collect the clippings.

I'm looking forward to designing and establishing my Xeriscape landscape so that I can eliminate yard work!

Xeriscape landscapes require a lot less maintenance than traditional landscapes, but no landscape is maintenance free! By applying Xeriscape principles, such as putting the right plant in the right place and efficiently irrigating plants, as needed, the landscape is no longer treated as one giant plant that receives too much of something in one area and not enough in another. The addition of nutrients and the treatment of damage or disease is on an as-needed basis only in the areas requiring attention. In this way, you can reduce the amount of time and money spent on fertilizers, pesticides, fungicides, and irrigation. However, regular maintenance, such as pruning, mowing, and checking the irrigation system for leaks or damage, is important for the health of any landscape.

For specific landscape, garden and plant information, contact your local county cooperative extension office or another landscape professional familiar with soil, moisture and other conditions in your area.

**Southwest Florida
Water Management District**
1-800-423-1476

**The Florida Nurserymen and
Growers Association (FNGA)**
(407) 295-7994

**The Florida Irrigation
Society (FIS)**
(407) 678-8119

**Landscape Maintenance
Association (LMA)**
(407) 672-0633

Florida Native Plant Society
(813) 856-8202

**County Cooperative
Extension Offices**

- Charlotte - (941) 639-6255
- DeSoto - (941) 993-4846
- Hernando - (352) 754-4433
- Hillsborough - (813) 744-5519
- Levy - (352) 486-5131
- Marion - (352) 620-3440
- Pinellas - (727) 582-2100
- Sarasota - (941) 316-1000
- Citrus - (352) 726-2141
- Hardee - (941) 773-2164
- Highlands - (941) 386-6540
- Lake - (352) 343-4101
- Manatee - (941) 722-4524
- Pasco - (352) 521-4288
- Polk - (941) 533-0765
- Sumter - (352) 793-2728

Southwest Florida
Water Management District 

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