

Drought Tolerant Gardening

SUCCESSFUL WATER-WISE GARDENING: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Because almost all drought tolerant plants have a vast, far-reaching taproot that seeks water out deep below the soil's surface, well-amended soil is a must when planting a drought-tolerant garden. Pacific Northwest gardeners are often faced with heavy clay that does not drain well—the demise for many landscape plants. For this reason, compost *must* be added to native soil if drought-tolerant plants are to survive. Even if you are planting a sloped area, adding about 1/3 compost to 2/3 native soil is imperative; water must soak deep into the soil where, in times of drought, plants' taproot systems can have access. Mixing homemade compost and/or Black Forest compost into your native clay soil will greatly improve the texture, aeration and draining capacity, so this should be your first priority when planting a water-wise garden.

Xeriscaping is a landscaping method specifically designed for water conservation in hot, sunny areas. Whether that be an entire geographic region (i.e. Arizona), or merely areas in your yard, by decreasing the amount of lawn, using native plants, mulching beds and installing an efficient irrigation system, you will be an active participant in water-wise gardening.

'Xeros' is Greek for "dry", so literally xeriscape translates to "dry landscape". Gardening in hot, dry situations is most successful when compatible plant choices and cultural practices are engaged. For example, consider decreasing or eliminating the lawn in your yard; think of all the water you won't consume this summer! Lawns can easily be replaced by any number of drought-tolerant plants, including those native to the Pacific Northwest. Plants that are indigenous to an area are already acclimated to the extremes that weather can bring, making native plants a smart gardening choice. Once your beds are established, you'll need to set in place an efficient irrigation system. Irrigation options can range from simply laying down soaker hoses to extensive systems professionally installed for you. The goal of an efficient system is to water less frequently but *deeply* into the soil. In addition to smart watering, you'll need to mulch your beds with several inches of bark chips, hazelnut shells, compost—either homemade and/or Black Forest, etc. to prevent the soil from drying out too quickly and to promote a healthy soil environment (for microbes, worms, etc.). Need help? Call us! 503.777.7777

They may be tough and tolerant of a hot, dry, sunny environment, but drought tolerant plants need water, too. This is particularly true their first season in the ground when extensive taproot systems must get established. Be prepared to provide supplemental water to newly planted trees, shrubs and perennials for a minimum of one hour per week for the first summer season. During the hottest part of the summer season, additional water may be needed. Watering slowly and deeply will ensure precious water goes deep into the soil versus flowing off the area. The second and third summers will require that you watch your plants during the hottest days, potentially giving them supplemental water. At any time, if your plants begin to wilt, water them! By the third or fourth summer, plants should be established enough to feed themselves.

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR HOT, DRY AND SUNNY AREAS

Plants that are native to the Pacific Northwest are noted with '(N)'

TREES

Madrone/*Arbutus menziesii* (N)—to 35'-45', slow growing, unusual red bark, evergreen leaves, white bell-shaped flowers

Western Redbud/*Cercis occidentalis* (N)—10'-18' tall & wide, deciduous, sweet pink flowers along branches in spring followed by heart-shaped green leaves

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Eastern Redbud / *Cercis Canadensis*— 25'-35' tall & wide, fast growing, deciduous, pink flowers on bare spring branches followed by heart-shaped green leaves

Incense Cedar / *Calocedrus decurrens* (N)—to 75'-90' tall & 10'-15' wide at the base, dense, evergreen, fan-shaped sprays of fragrant foliage, reddish bark with interesting texture

Deodar Cedar / *Cedrus deodora*—40'-80' tall & 40' wide, fast growing, typically green (some varieties have blue or yellow cast), clustered foliage, soft looking texture, evergreen

Ponderosa Pine / *Pinus ponderosa* (N)—50'-100' tall & 25'-30' wide, moderate-fast grower, evergreen, stiff green foliage, orange-brown bark

Eucalyptus / *Eucalyptus* spp.—size varies by species, most have silver or grey leaves & gorgeous bark

Fig (edible) / *Ficus carica*—20' tall & wide, fast growers, deciduous, unique large hand-shaped foliage, edible fruit in summer

Cypress / *Cupressus* spp.—size varies by species, evergreen, typically green foliage, tough family of plants!

Spruce / *Picea* spp.—size varies by species (and some species are native), evergreen, fragrant green foliage

Silk tree / *Albizia julibrissin*—20'-35' tall & wide, fast growing, deciduous, large airy pink flowers in summer

Japanese zelkova / *Zelkova serrata*—60' tall & wide, deciduous, elliptical green foliage has jagged edges, smooth grey bark

Sweet bay / *Laurus nobilis*—12'-14' tall & wide, slow grower, evergreen, multi-stemmed, fragrant leathery green foliage, culinary uses

SHRUBS

Smoke bush / *Cotinus coggygria*—typically 7'-15' tall & wide, oval foliage colored maroon, purple, green or yellow, billowing puffs of flowers in summer

Compact Strawberry bush / *Arbutus unedo* 'Compacta'—8'-10' tall & wide, slow to moderate growing, evergreen, stunning red, peeling bark, oblong, red stemmed dark green leaves, white urn-shaped flowers, yellow (young) and red (mature) fruit (texture like that of strawberry) appear at the same time as flowers in the winter, fruit is edible but usually bland flavored—birds love them though!

Crape myrtle / *Lagerstroemia indica*—4'-25' tall & wide (varies by variety), deciduous, attractive peeling bark, late summer flowers of white, pink or red, fall color

Oregon myrtle or California wax myrtle / *Umbellularia californica* (N)—6'-15' tall & wide, evergreen, dark green leaves, suitable as a hedge

Rockrose / *Cistus* spp.—2'-5' tall & wide, evergreen, attractive foliage is green, silver or greyish (some varieties are wooly), profusion of pink or white flowers spring into early summer

Manzanita / *Arctostaphylos* spp. (some N)—size varies by species (from groundcover to tree-like shrubs), evergreen, crooked branches with smooth red to purple bark, white to pink urn-shaped flowers in late winter to early spring followed by red or brown fruit—birds love them!

Barberry / *Berberis* spp.—1.5'-10' tall & wide (varies by species and variety), most are deciduous but some are evergreen, dense & spiny stems, foliage color varies: red, orange, yellow, purple, green

California lilac / *Ceanothus* spp.—1.5'-15' tall & wide (varies by species and variety), generally evergreen, foliage ranges from tiny to big & is variant in green coloration, typically flowers in spring—white, pale blue, powdery blue, deep violet blue color varies by species and variety

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Juniper/Juniperus spp.—size varies by species and variety, evergreen, green or blue stiff foliage, tough family of plants!

Oregon Grape/Mahonia aquifolium (N)—6' tall & 5' wide, evergreen, glossy green holly-like foliage, bronzy new growth, purplish winter color, yellow flowers in spring followed by edible bluish-black fruit (birds love them!)

Escallonia/Escallonia spp.—2'-15' tall & wide (varies by species), evergreen, glossy dark green foliage, pink or white summer flowers

Silk tassel/Garrya elliptica (N)—4'-10' tall & wide, evergreen, elliptical foliage has wavy edges, long, silky, tassel-like flowers appear in winter and persist into spring

Lavender/Lavendula spp—size varies by species and variety, evergreen, fragrant pale to dark purple, pink or white flowers all summer, culinary uses

Rosemary/Rosmarinus officinalis—size varies by variety, evergreen, fragrant green foliage, culinary uses

Snowberry/Symphoricarpos albus (N)—2'-6' tall & wide, deciduous, roundish green foliage, pink flowers are followed by white fruit that persists over the winter.

Red flowering currant/Ribes sanguineum (N)—to 5'-12' tall & wide, fast growing, deciduous, foliage shape resembles that of maples & is dark green, gorgeous drooping pink flowers in spring

Yew/Taxus spp.—size varies by species and variety, of which there are many, slow growing, evergreen, dark green foliage

PERENNIALS

Western Columbine/Aquilegia formosa (N)—1.5'-3' tall & 1.5' wide, lacy green foliage, nodding red & yellow flowers in spring

Goldenrod/Solidago (N)—1.5'-3' tall & 1.5'-2' wide, leafy stems held on woody branches, branching clusters of small, bright yellow flowers in late summer

Yarrow/Achillea millefolium (N)—narrow, green or greyish leaves, flat flower heads held on 1.5'-2' stems, various colors available, long summer bloom time

Butterfly weed/Asclepias tuberosa—3' tall & 1' wide, multiple stems hold clusters of bright orange flowers that are irresistible to butterflies!

Sea holly/Eryngium amethystinum—to 2.5' tall & 1.5' wide, spiny leaves of medium green, silvery blue stems hold conical bluish-purple flowers in summer

Blanket flower/Gaillardia x grandiflora—2'-4' tall & 1.5' wide, rough greyish-green foliage, daisy-shaped flowers in shades of red & yellow with orange or maroon band, long summer bloom time

Cone flower/Echinacea—1.5'-4' tall & 1.5'-2' wide, daisy-shaped flowers with dome-like centers are held on long, stiff stems above oblong, bristly green, clumping foliage—wide range of flower color

Red-hot poker/Kniphofia spp.—1.5'-5' tall & 2'-3' wide, dense clumps of grass-like green foliage, torch-shaped flowers borne on bare stems, blossoms open bottom to top & change color as they mature

Russian sage/Perovskia atriplicifolia—3'-4' tall & wide, woody base gives rise to multiple upright stems covered in grey-green foliage, sprays of small lavender-blue flowers late spring through summer

Jerusalem Sage/Phlomis fruticosa—to 4' tall & wide, wooly grey-green leaves, deep yellow ball-shaped flowers along the upper half stems spring through summer (must lightly cut back after each flowering for repeat bloom)—quite unique addition to the garden

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Wallflower/*Erysimum* spp. & hybrids—narrow foliage, clusters of 4-petaled flowers (wide range of colors) nearly 12 months of the year

California fuchsia/*Zauschneria californica*—6"-4' tall (variety dependent) & 3'-4' wide, upright or arching habit, narrow green leaves, orange to red flowers in summer—hummingbirds can't resist them!

Verbena/*Verbena bonariensis*—3'-6' tall & 1.5'-3' wide, grown as an annual that readily self-sows (reseeds), green foliage stays low to the ground, tall, airy, branching stems carry small, tubular purple flowers in summer

Tickseed/*Coreopsis grandiflora*—1'-2' tall & 3' wide, narrow dark green foliage, long slender stems hold daisy-shaped flowers, long summer bloom time

Sage/*Salvia* spp.—size varies by species and variety, green to grey to yellow foliage, all have square stems and whorls of two-lipped flowers along stalks, wide range of flower color, spring to summer bloom time

Cape Fuchsia/*Phygelius* spp.—3'-4' tall & wide, dark green oval leaves have finely toothed edges, drooping tubular flowers in a variety of colors, blooms summer to fall, hummingbird magnet!

Baby's breath/*Gypsophila paniculata*—to 3' tall & wide, slender pointed green foliage on stiff stems, hundreds of tiny white flowers bloom in sprays giving a billowy appearance

ORNAMENTAL GRASSES

California fescue/*Festuca californica* (N)—2'-3' tall & 1'-2' wide, loose clump of blue-green or blue-grey foliage, airy flowers appear in late spring/early summer

Tufted hair grass/*Deschampsia caespitosa* (N)—1'-2' tall & 2' wide, clump of dark green, narrow foliage, airy flowers appear in late spring/early summer

Blue oat grass/*Helictotrichon sempervirens*—2'-3' tall & wide, semi-evergreen to evergreen, graceful fountain-like clump of narrow blue-grey foliage, wispy, straw-colored flowers arrive in spring

Japanese silver grass/*Miscanthus sinensis*—2'-5' tall & 2'-8' wide (many varieties), broad or narrow clumping leaves in varying shades of green, flowers in summer & looks like silky tassels

Switch grass/*Panicum virgatum*—4'-7' tall & 2'-4' wide, narrow deep green clumping foliage, slender flower clusters open to airy clouds beginning in midsummer

Black mondo grass/*Ophiopogon planiscapus 'Nigrescens'*—8" tall & 1' wide, tufts of narrow foliage that emerges green and quickly turns to black, bell-shaped white or pale purple flowers in summer are followed by black fruit

Feather reed grass/*Calamagrostis x acutiflora 'Karl Foerster'*—2'-3' tall & somewhat wider, arching, narrow clump of bright green leaves, buff-colored flowers emerge in late spring/early summer and can rise to 6' tall

GROUNDCOVERS

Creeping mahonia/*Mahonia repens* (N)—to 1' tall & 3' wide, evergreen, dull blue-green leaves take on bronzy-purple coloration during fall & winter, mid to late spring clusters of yellow flowers followed by blue berries

Oregon stonecrop/*Sedum oregonum* (N)—less than 6" tall & 6"-1' wide, fleshy green, mat-forming leaves that turn bronzy-purple in fall, bright yellow flowers in summer

Bearberry or kinnikinnick/*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* (N) —

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Oregon grape/*Mahonia aquifolium* (N)-- 6' tall & 5' wide, evergreen, glossy green holly-like foliage, bronzy new growth, purplish winter color, yellow flowers in spring followed by edible bluish-black fruit (birds love them!)

Beach strawberry/*Fragaria chiloensis* (N)—6"-12" tall & 1'-2' wide, 3-lobed glossy green leaves, white flowers in spring followed by small, red edible fruit

Creeping juniper/*Juniperus horizontalis*—1' tall & 2'-4' wide, evergreen, grey-green to bluish foliage

Lithodora/*Lithodora diffusa*—6"-12" tall & 2' wide, evergreen, small deep green leaves, rich indigo blue flowers in spring

Thyme/*Thymus* spp.—3"-6" tall & 6"-1' wide, evergreen, wide variety of foliage color, tiny flowers through summer, culinary uses

Candytuft/*Iberis sempervirens*—1' tall & 1'-2' wide, evergreen, tiny dark green leaves, abundant white flowers at branch tips spring & sporadically through summer

Pinks/*Dianthus* spp.—size varies by species & variety, primarily evergreen, grass-like green, blue-green foliage, fragrant flowers of various colors spring into early summer

Bearberry/*Cotoneaster dammeri cotoneaster*—8" tall & 10' wide, woody branches hold small, bright glossy green foliage, bright red fruit