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XERISCAPES: WATER EFFICIENT LANDSCAPES

So what exactly is a xeriscape?



Xeriscape combines the Greek word “xeros” (meaning dry) with “landscape”. A trademark of the Colorado Waterwise Council, it refers to a water-wise approach to landscaping. Xeriscaping has now gained wide acceptance in Ontario, where the demand for water in many fast-growing communities is exceeding supplies.

Xeriscapes are composed of hardy, drought tolerant plants adapted to local rainfall amounts without the need for supplementary watering. The beauty of drought-tolerant plants is that they generally remain vigorous even through dry periods. Many native plant species are particularly well suited to water efficient landscapes, as they have

evolved in tandem with local rainfall conditions.

Xeriscaping does not necessarily exclude species that demand more water. The key is to group these species together into distinct watering zones, and to adopt efficient watering and irrigation practices that minimize waste and evaporation.

In a xeriscape, lawn areas are reduced to what is needed for practical or functional reasons, while the rest of the landscape might be devoted, for instance, to drought tolerant perennial and shrub ground covers (or, in some cases, ornamental stone beds). Alternatives to the common lawn are now also widely available, in-

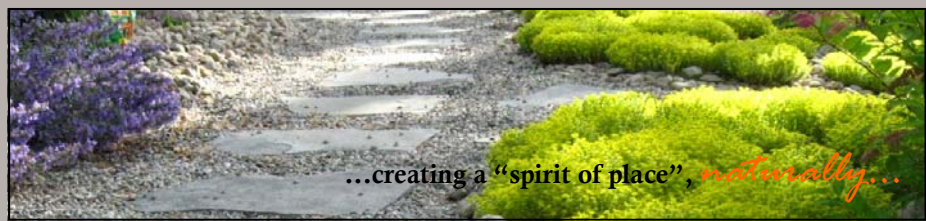
cluding wildflower, yarrow, fescue, clover and/or thyme lawn seed mixes. These can be mown and will stay green through the summer with little or no watering beyond natural rainfall.

Xeriscaping may involve garden soil amendments. Sandy soils readily absorb water but drain quickly, whereas clay soils hold moisture but have a low absorption rate. The key, in either case, is to incorporate lots of organic matter in your garden soil to maximize water absorption and retention. Water retention is further enhanced

through the extensive use of mulches. Mulches can also help minimize weed growth, and can become an attractive landscape feature that enhances plantings.

Finally, xeriscaping should also under-

line the collection and storage of rainwater off rooftops and pavements for use in the garden. Green roofs and porous pavements are other components of an effective water



...creating a “spirit of place”, *naturally...*

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