

# xer·i·scape

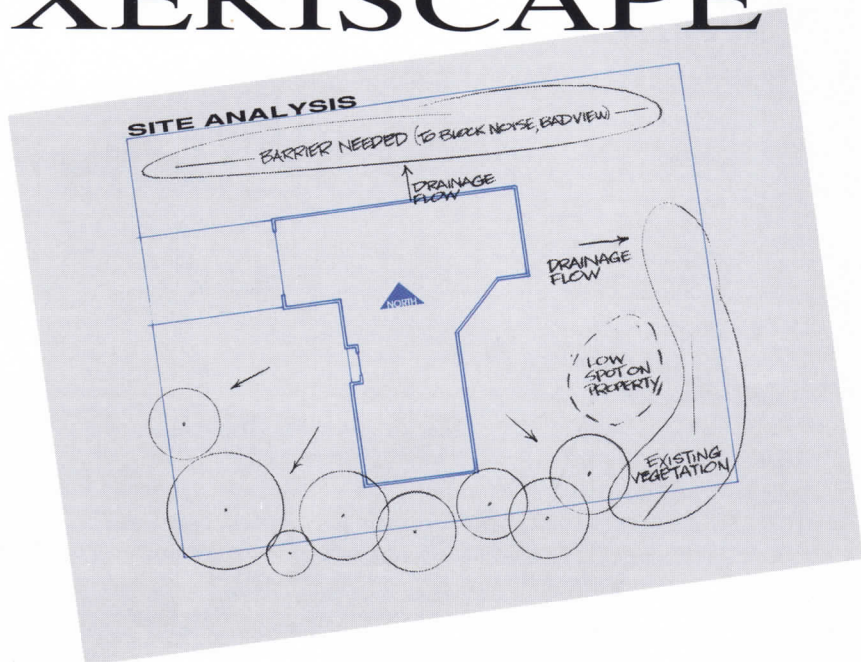
\ˈzɪr-ə-skāp\ *n.* [Greek *xeros*, dry]:  
water conservation through creative landscaping

**W**ater conservation in Florida is becoming increasingly important. Outdoor irrigation can account for 50 percent or more of the average homeowner's water use. A water-conserving landscape will save the homeowner money on water, energy and maintenance bills and will help preserve the state's valuable fresh water resources.

*Xeriscapes originated in the arid southwestern United States. Contrary to the image of rock and cactus gardens, Florida Xeriscapes resemble lush traditional gardens. Through careful planning they save 30 to 80 percent of the irrigation water.*



# Seven Steps *to a Successful* XERISCAPE



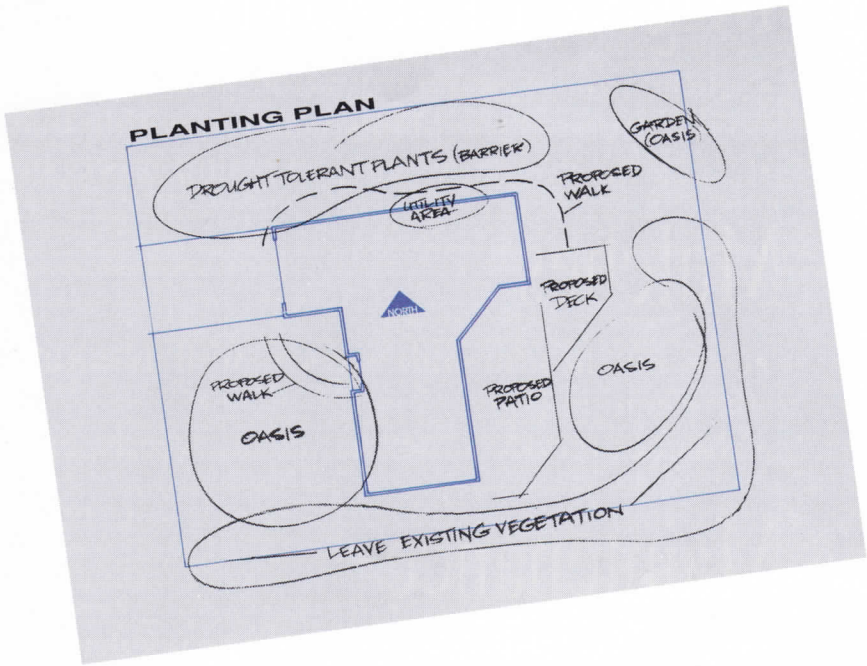
## 1

### DESIGN

Careful designing is crucial to the long-term enjoyment and success of a Xeriscape. A Xeriscape should be designed to complement your lifestyle and activities.

A planned Xeriscape can be installed in phases, minimizing the initial investment.

There are two principle elements to a landscape design: the site analysis and the planting plan. The site analysis shows existing conditions such as slope, drainage, north-south orientation and the location of native plants and permanent structures. The planting plan illustrates the placement of plant beds, grass, paths and driveways, and includes a list of new plants to be installed.



# 2

## SELECT APPROPRIATE PLANTS

Putting the right plant in the right spot is crucial to a successful Xeriscape. The key is to cluster plants according to their sunlight and water needs.

Landscape “zones”— areas with plants having similar irrigation and maintenance requirements — are determined by the planting plan and site analysis. The three zones are:

**Natural Zones** - These are areas where plants live on natural rainfall. Native plants have adapted to the wet and dry extremes of the Florida climate and many can thrive in full sun with no irrigation. Some cultivated plants have also adapted to these conditions. When planted in shade, many more cultivated plants will succeed. A few natives will do well in normally wet areas. On your site analysis, identify areas that have plants and incorporate them into the planting plan. They have adapted and will continue to do well.

***Drought Tolerant Zones*** - Plants in these areas are native and cultivated species. They are able to survive extended periods of time without rainfall or supplemental irrigation. There will be brief periods when watering is necessary.

***Oasis Zones*** - Oasis plants require frequent irrigation and need to be grouped together. This eliminates the need to water the entire landscape at their required rate. A typical oasis zone might be the entryway, the grass areas, or flower, fruit or vegetable gardens. Remember, these plants are normally placed in the full sun and if used under shade trees they may be drought tolerant.

# 3

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## IMPROVE THE SOIL

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Florida soils are mostly sand and have very little ability to absorb or hold water. Adding organic matter to the soil improves its water retention. However, due to Florida's high humidity and water temperature, organic matter breaks down rapidly, thus limiting the length of effectiveness.

Flower and vegetable gardens which are continually replanted benefit from the repeated addition of organic matter. Sources of organic matter include homemade compost and packaged peat, manure and topsoil.

# 4

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## USE TURF WISELY

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Grass areas are part of an oasis zone. Grass uses more water and requires more maintenance than any other part of the landscape. Therefore, grass should be concentrated in areas used for recreation and leisure.

Other grass sections used for aesthetic purposes (looks only) should be minimized and shaped for maximum ease of mowing and edging. Consider alternatives to grass such as attractive ground cover plantings, or decks, patios and walkways made of permeable materials.

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# 5

## IRRIGATE EFFICIENTLY

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Grouping plants according to their water needs maximizes irrigation efficiency. Oasis zones are irrigated separately from drought tolerant zones, and natural zones do not require irrigation. Select correct irrigation heads for the type of plants being watered. For example, a spray system works well for lawns, but drip, bubblers or micro-sprinklers are more appropriate for planted areas. These types of irrigation heads enable water to be applied only to the root system with minimal evaporation. Weekly inspection of the system is very important. Broken parts may need repairing and spray heads may need to be aligned to keep from watering pavement. Additional conservation tips are:

- *reduce irrigation during the rainy summer and dormant winter,*
- *use a rain gauge to avoid overwatering, and*
- *irrigate during early morning hours when evaporation is minimal.*

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# 6

## USE MULCHES

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A two- to three-inch layer of mulch minimizes evaporation from the soil, reduces weeds, moderates soil temperature and slows erosion. Mulched beds are an attractive alternative to grass and help accent design features. Organic mulches include shredded or chipped bark, pine needles and oak leaves. Inorganic mulches, such as stone or gravel, can also be used. Place the mulch directly on the soil and leave a one- to two-inch space between the base of the plant and the mulch. This space prevents the stem from rotting.

# 7

## PRACTICE PROPER MAINTENANCE

Xeriscapes, by design, reduce maintenance expense and time. Proper maintenance will protect the beauty of the Xeriscape and enhance the water savings. Two common maintenance mistakes are overwatering and overfertilizing. Overwatering increases the water bill, disease and insect control expenses, and plant replacement costs. Overfertilizing promotes fast but weak growth which makes plants vulnerable to freezes and possible breakage in high winds. Excessive growth also increases the amount of water the plant needs. Two maintenance practices which reduce the amount of water needed are:

- *raise the lawn mower blade(s) to get a higher cut. This encourages grass roots to grow deeper, making the grass more drought tolerant;*
- *prune plants to the desired shape and remove diseased parts. This encourages healthy growth, prevents the plant from becoming overgrown, and keeps its water needs at a minimum.*

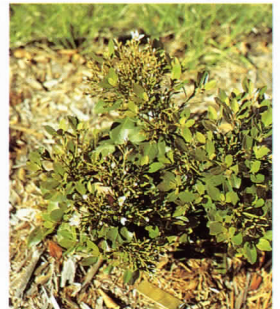


*Pindo Palm*

*Coontie*



*India Hawthorn*



*Yellow Carolina  
Jessamine*

# DROUGHT TOLERANT PLANTS

		Full Sun	Partial Sun	Shade	
		☉	☼	●	
Trees	native	PINES	✓		
		OAKS	✓		
		SOUTHERN RED CEDAR	✓		
		AMERICAN HOLLY	✓		
		DAHOON HOLLY		✓	
		YAUPON HOLLY		✓	
		WAX MYRTLE	✓	✓	✓
	cultivated	GRAPE MYRTLE	✓		
		WEeping ELM	✓		
JERUSALEM THORN		✓			
Palms & Cycads	native	CABBAGE PALM	✓		
		PAUROTIS PALM	✓		
		SAW PALMETTO	✓		
		NEEDLE PALM		✓	✓
		COONTIE	✓	✓	
		cultivated	PINDO PALM	✓	
	WASHINGTON PALM		✓		
	PHOENIX PALM		✓		
	LADY PALM				✓
	BAMBOO PALM		✓	✓	✓
	WINDMILL PALM	✓	✓	✓	
Shrubs	native	TAR FLOWER	✓		
		ST. JOHN'S WORT	✓	✓	
		FETTER BUSH		✓	✓
	cultivated	OLEANDER	✓		
		JUNIPERS	✓		
		JASMINES	✓		
		INDIA HAWTHORN	✓	✓	
		GARDENIA		✓	
		CORNUTA HOLLIES		✓	
		Ground Covers	native	BEACH SUNFLOWER	✓
BLUE EYED GRASS	✓			✓	
SWORD FERN				✓	✓
cultivated	WEDELIA		✓		
	DWARF JUNIPERS		✓		
	DWARF CONFEDERATE JASMINE			✓	
	BORDER GRASS			✓	
CAST IRON PLANT		✓	✓		
Vines	native	YELLOW CAROLINA JESSAMINE	✓	✓	
		CORAL HONEYSUCKLE	✓	✓	
		TRUMPET VINE		✓	✓
	cultivated	CREeping FIG	✓	✓	
		CONFEDERATE JASMINE		✓	
		ALGERIAN IVY		✓	✓



**For more information**, contact the Planning Department of the Southwest Florida Water Management District, 2379 Broad Street, Brooksville, Florida 34609-6899, or call the Planning Department at (904) 796-7211 or toll free at 1-800-423-1476.

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# 1 Design

- Group plants with similar water requirements.
- Increase shade areas to decrease the water needs of plants.

# 2 Plant Selection

- Natural zone plants require only natural rainfall.
- Preserve areas of native vegetation.
- Drought tolerant zone plants require minimal irrigation.
- Oasis zone plants require frequent watering.
- Limit this area to places where it can be justified.

# 3 Improve The Soil

- Add organic matter to flower or vegetable garden before planting to increase the water holding ability of the soil.

# 4 Use Turf Wisely

- Consolidate area to ease maintenance and

water requirements

## 5 Irrigate Efficiently

- Set the time on each irrigation zone to correspond to the needs of the plants watered within that zone.
- Check the system weekly to insure it is operating.

## 6 Mulches

- Use mulches for walkways as well as within the planting beds.
- Mulches reduce watering needs, weeds, erosion,

## 7 Maintenance

- Water and fertilize plants only as needed, excessive amounts promotes weak growth and increases pruning and mowing requirements.
- Raise lawn mower blade(s) to promote deeper root growth.
- Keep shrubs pruned to intended height. Excess foliage requires additional water.



# XERISCAPE

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