

NoCo Bloom

JULY 2021



LARIMER COUNTY
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION



THE GARDENS
ON SPRING CREEK



City of
Fort Collins

WATER WISE GARDENING

MYTHS OF
XERISCAPING


STUPID
TURF!

XERIC PLANTS FOR
FORM & FUNCTION

7 STEPS FOR CREATING
A XERISCAPE GARDEN


PLEASE NOTE: If you are a gardener living in Weld County and needing help, visit www.WeldMasterGardeners.org or email the Weld Garden Help Desk directly at weldmastergardeners@outlook.com.

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WATERWISE GARDENING

The damp spring we had can make it hard to believe that just a little more than six months ago, the Cameron Peak fire was still burning. The ash still collecting in corners is a reminder of the ever-present water challenges in our region. So, as the temperatures rise this summer, we present to you a waterwise issue of NoCo Bloom.

Throughout this issue, you'll find answers to some of the most popular questions around xeriscape landscaping. This style of landscape design requiring little or no irrigation or other maintenance has become increasingly popular in Colorado, especially considering that supporters of xeriscaping say it can reduce water use by 50 or 75 percent.

Every drop
counts!




In this issue, our experts make it easy to plan your xeriscape project with everything from plant selection insights to dispelling common xeriscape myths. 



Colorado State University

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Horticulture and Landscape Architecture
301 University Ave., Fort Collins, CO 80523-1173
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**City of
Fort Collins**

THE GARDENS ON SPRING CREEK CITY OF FORT COLLINS

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970-416-2486 | fcgov.com/gardens 

SEVEN STEPS FOR CREATING YOUR

XERISCAPE



by Michelle Provaznik, Director, Gardens on Spring Creek

Although this past May was one of wettest on record, the shattering of heat records throughout June has been a good reminder that the next drought is just around the corner. If you want to be prepared, it is never too early to transition your yard into xeriscape.

What exactly is xeriscape? The authors of “Xeriscape Colorado” define xeriscape as “purposefully creating a

beautiful, restful outdoor environment without consuming thousands of gallons of expensively purified water in the process.” Xeriscape gardens are not “zeroscape” by any means. They are much more than junipers, rocks and cactus. Properly designed, they can be waterwise, lush, full of color and even include small lawns.

There are seven principles that guide incorporating xeriscape into your garden:

1 Planning & Design:

Start by determining how much time you want to spend maintaining the garden and the primary uses of the landscape. Next, create a base map of your landscape to use as your template for creating zones in your garden – hardscaping, flower beds, vegetables, lawn, etc. There are many good books, websites, designers and landscape architects who can help with design.



3 Create Practical Turf Areas:

Watering grass uses the majority of water in landscapes. Consider if a patio would be more useful than a turf area or how big a lawn your children really need. You may also want to look at non-traditional turf selections such as buffalo grass or blue grama. They require less water than traditional turf but cannot take heavy foot traffic.



2 Improve the Soil:

You may consider having a soil test to determine the exact needs of your medium but incorporating several inches of compost or other organic matter can make a big difference regardless. Quick plant growth and lots of color will be your reward. It is important to note that some of our native and desert plants prefer gravelly soils over compost-rich soils so it pays to do some research.



4 Appropriate Plant Selection:

As you’ll see from other articles in this issue, there are many beautiful xeric plants to choose from – many of which allow for color all season. Group plants together that have similar water and light requirements. Put plants that need more water in a low-lying area or near a down spout, put those that love hot dry areas in those locations in your garden.

GARDEN

5 Watering Efficiently:



Consider converting your planting bed to drip irrigation. By putting water directly in the root zone, drip irrigation is a more efficient method of watering. Grouping plants according to water needs is another effective tactic to help ensure you're making the most of every drop.

6 Mulching Plants:



Using mulch helps prevent weeds and minimizes water loss due to evaporation. Wood mulch should be applied two to four inches deep, small rock or pea gravel can be applied two to three inches deep. Some plants prefer mulch vs. rock, so this is another area where research can be especially helpful.

7 Maintenance:



A properly maintained garden helps keep the landscape beautiful and healthy.

To learn more about xeriscaping, check out these organizations with xeriscape demonstration gardens and other resources:

- Cheyenne Botanic Gardens, www.botanic.org
- Gardens on Spring Creek, www.fcgov.com/gardens
- Northern Water, www.northernwater.org

July 17 » **Master Food Safety Advisors at the Market**
Larimer County Farmers Market, 200 W. Oak St.,
9:00am - 1:00pm, Free admission, larimercountyfm.org

July 17 - July 31 » **Summer Perennial Sale**
Fort Collins Nursery, 2121 E. Mulberry St., 9:00am - 5:00pm
(Monday - Saturday), 10:00am - 5:00pm (Sunday),
Free admission, fortcollinsnursery.com

July 18 » **Garden BodyFLOW in The Gardens with Rain Tree Athletic Club**
Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 9:00am - 10:00am,
\$15, fcgov.com/gardens/adult-classes

July 24 » **Poetry in The Gardens Series: Poetry, Memory and Childhood**
Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 9:30am - 12:30pm,
\$40, fcgov.com/gardens/adult-classes

July 24 » **Read & Seed**
Larimer County Farmers Market, 200 W. Oak St.,
9:00am - 1:00pm, Free admission, larimercountyfm.org

July 31 » **CSU Annual Trial Gardens Consumer Day**
CSU Annual Trial Gardens, 1401 Remington St.,
9:00am - 12:00pm, Free admission, hortla.agsci.colostate.edu

July 31 » **Master Food Safety Advisors at the Market**
Larimer County Farmers Market, 200 W. Oak St.,
9:00am - 1:00pm, Free admission, larimercountyfm.org

August 3 » **Garden to Fork Cooking Class: Brilliant Brassicas**
Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 5:30pm - 8:00pm,
\$70, fcgov.com/gardens/adult-classes

August 7 » **Larimer County Farmers' Market**
Larimer County Farmers Market, 200 W. Oak St.,
9:00am - 1:00pm, Free admission, larimercountyfm.org

August 7 » **Poetry in The Gardens Series: Poetry of Place**
Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 9:30am - 12:30pm,
\$40, fcgov.com/gardens/adult-classes

August 14 » **Watercolor Journaling**
Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 9:30am - 12:30pm,
\$60, fcgov.com/gardens/adult-classes

August 17 » **Garden to Fork Cooking Class: Bushels of Berries**
Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 5:30pm - 8:00pm,
\$70, fcgov.com/gardens/adult-classes

August 21 » **Beekeeping Series: Season Closeout**
Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave.,
10:30am - 12:30pm, \$18, fcgov.com/gardens/adult-classes

August 21 » **Read & Seed**
Larimer County Farmers Market, 200 W. Oak St.,
9:00am - 1:00pm, Free admission, larimercountyfm.org

August 24 » **Twilight Garden Series: Garden Design**
Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 6:00pm - 8:00pm,
\$10 each/all 3 events \$25, hortla.agsci.colostate.edu

Underused Xeric Plants for Form and Texture



Bryan Fischer, Horticulturist,
The Gardens on Spring Creek

While Larimer County has so far been spared the significant drought conditions taking hold in much of the state, the weather patterns enveloping our region underscore our tenuous relationship with this precious resource: water. Rather than holding to outdated practices and ideals (looking at you, **BIG GREEN LAWNS**), consider transitioning some of that water-hogging turf or thirsty traditional perennial border into a xeric planting to reduce your use of this precious resource. Your water bill, downstream users and local pollinators surely won't complain!

Not often thought of as a flowering plant due to their antagonistic appearance, many species in the genus *Yucca* put on a great show. Ranging from the regionally native, single stemmed, two- to three-foot *Yucca glauca* to gigantic (think eight feet when in bloom) *Yucca rostrata* with branched inflorescences, a much broader range of yucca species, each with its own merits in the garden, are appropriate for our region. Most of these produce a showy bloom sometime between late spring and mid-summer, and all feature attractive, fine-textured, blue or green foliage year-round.

A particular favorite of mine, *Yucca rostrata* (beaked or Big Bend yucca) produces slender, blue leaf blades that seem to waver in a breeze like aspen leaves, yielding a shimmering effect, and is perfectly hardy in our region despite its Texas origins. A true tree yucca, these plants slowly grow up like a palm, making them fantastic form or texture additions to otherwise flat beds. They pump out shamelessly huge (best measured in feet tall) panicles of one-inch, hanging, white flowers in late spring whose vertical form contrasts well with the rounded shape of the plants' foliage.

Yucca pallida is another species that I'm fond of. Much more petite, the plant rarely exceeds two to three feet in height. Great in meadows,

this species produces wider, blue leaves with a colored margin that are highly effective in mass plantings or with fine-textured grasses. It, too, produces a handsome bloom in late spring, though not as large or as dense as *Y. rostrata*.

With glossy, teardrop shaped leaves arranged in pairs and tall, glowing magenta, tube-shaped blooms held in wide sprays, *Penstemon pseudospectabilis* (desert penstemon) makes a fantastic foil for the linear foliage and rounded form of our *Yucca* plants. Depending on the year, they can overlap in bloom period, too! Far hardier than I expected given its southwestern desert origins, these plants not only overwinter well in our area and reliably self-sow in gravel mulch. This trait has been great for their persistence in my garden, as they tend to be short-lived perennials. Expect them to reach three feet or higher when in bloom, which lasts for weeks in late spring-early summer, and provide attractive filler the rest of the season thanks to their clean-looking foliage.

Another plant from the southwestern desert that I've been impressed with in recent years, *Fendlera rupicola*, forms a small-leaved, moderate-sized shrub in our landscapes. Growing at a moderate pace, the shrub is quite drought-tolerant and could easily hydrozone with both plants mentioned previously. I enjoy its exuberant display of delicate, four-petaled flowers in late spring; they're unusually impactful for such a xeric shrub! The blooms aren't dissimilar to those of mock orange, to which the plant is related. They also, thanks to their understated nature and neutral color, make a great backdrop for a loud annual display or hot-colored penstemon. While cliff fendlerbush gets five feet tall, it has responded well to even harsh pruning in my gardens.

Employing conservative growth strategies that emphasize slow and steady progress over rapid, water-intensive growth, many xeric and native plants have a gangly, twiggy look after planting. To help these plantings grow into your landscape

with a bit of grace, consider intermingling some xeric annuals. Best sown in February right before a snow so that their seeds stick to the ground where they receive water and a place to germinate, such plants can fill out by June and provide a lasting display to help visually knit a new planting into a space more naturally.

Particular favorites of mine in this arena include the classic California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*), with luminescent, four-petaled, satin-textured flowers above svelte, ferny, blue-green foliage that looks great all season. Quite xeric despite their delicate appearance, the plants excel in hot, dry spaces in my gardens. A blue counterpart to the orange poppy, love-in-a-mist (also called devil-in-a-bush or *Nigella*) provides equally interesting texture in the garden, yet with a blue or white flower. *Nigella* also provides extended interest thanks to persistent, fascinatingly inflated seed capsules that sport "horns", hence its lesser-used common name. I have grown *Nigella damascena*, *Nigella sativa*, and *Nigella hispanica*, all with success. *Nigella hispanica* is the most xeric of the bunch.

While sometimes a challenge to turn up, these plants are worth the work. After all, the only way that they will become more common in the trade is through sale at nurseries, who produce inventory in response to demand. So, head to your local nursery and ask for some regionally appropriate plants! If local sources don't provide these plants (even after an ask), mail order can surely fill the gap.



Yucca glauca



Penstemon pseudospectabilis



Eschscholzia californica



Yucca rostrata

events 'n classes

August 26 » **Garden Bootcamp with Rain Tree Athletic Club**
Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 5:30pm - 6:30pm,
\$15, fcgov.com/gardens/adult-classes

August 28 » **Master Food Safety Advisors at the Market**
Larimer County Farmers Market, 200 W. Oak St.,
9:00am - 1:00pm, Free admission, larimercountyfm.org

August 28 – September 6 » **Yard Sale**
Fort Collins Nursery, 2121 E. Mulberry St., 9:00am - 5:00pm
(Monday - Saturday), 10:00am - 5:00pm (Sunday),
Free admission, fortcollinsnursery.com

August 31 » **Garden to Fork Cooking Class:
Mild and Wild Chilies**
Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 5:30pm - 8:00pm,
\$70, fcgov.com/gardens/adult-classes

August 31 » **Twilight Garden Series:
Fall/Holiday Container Gardening and Perennial Care**
CSU Annual Trial Gardens, 1401 Remington St.,
6:00pm - 8:00pm, \$10 each/all 3 events \$25,
hortla.agsci.colostate.edu

September 4 » **Larimer County Farmers' Market**
Larimer County Farmers Market, 200 W. Oak St.,
9:00am - 1:00pm, Free admission, larimercountyfm.org

September 7 » **Twilight Garden Series:
Putting Your Garden To Bed**
Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 6:00pm - 8:00pm,
\$10 each/all 3 events \$25, hortla.agsci.colostate.edu

September 11 » **The Chicken Olympics**
Larimer County Farmers Market, 200 W. Oak St.,
9:00am - 1:00pm, Free admission, larimercountyfm.org

FORT LUPTON

September 10 – September 11 » **Fort Lupton Trapper Day**
453 1st St., 11:00am - 4:00pm, Free admission,
fortlupton.org/472/Trapper-Days

FREDERICK

July 16, August 13, August 27, September 10 » **Frederick
Market Crist Park**
North Side, 105 5th St., 4:00pm - 8:00pm, Free admission,
frederickco.gov/241/Finale-Fridays-Frederick-Market

GREELEY

Every Saturday » **Greeley Farmers' Market**
Union Pacific Depot, 902 7th Ave., 9:00am - 12:00pm,
Free admission, continues every Saturday through October,
farmersmarket@greeleygov.com

July 27 – July 31 » **Weld County Flower Show
and Vegetable Show**
4-H & Open Class, 525 N 15th Ave, Free,
weldcountyfair.com/home

STUPID TURF!



by Tony Koski,
Extension Turf Specialist,
CSU Department
of Horticulture and
Landscape Architecture

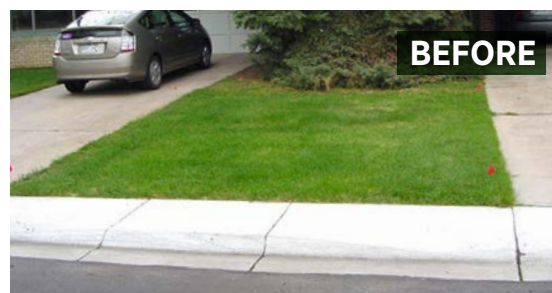


Why is the extension turf specialist – who should love all things turf – calling turf “stupid”?

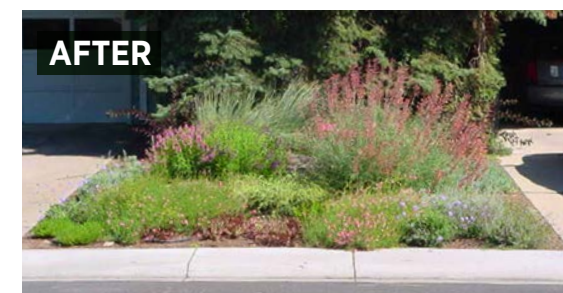
Home lawns and other areas planted in turfgrass provide numerous environmental, economic, recreational and mental health benefits to people, pets and society as a whole. But sometimes grass is planted in places where you can find no better way of describing it than to use the word stupid.



Stupid turf areas are those that provide no potential for recreation, play, or other uses – and because of their design are difficult to mow, water, fertilize and aerate efficiently or effectively. Stupid turf could be that long narrow strip of grass between the concrete driveways of neighboring homes, or thin, unhealthy grassy areas under and around evergreen trees. Grass growing in narrow medians down the center of busy streets or on very steep slopes is “stupid” because it can be both difficult and dangerous to maintain.



BEFORE



AFTER

So what can be done to make these areas less stupid? Killing or removing the stupid grass and replacing it with an organic mulch (bark chips, shredded tree trimmings) can be an easy solution – especially under conifers and where heavy tree shade makes growing healthy grass impossible. Converting the turf area from a species requiring frequent mowing and irrigation (bluegrass, fescues) to a species requiring fewer, less intensive inputs (buffalograss, blue grama, little bluestem) can be a creative and attractive solution. Small, odd-shaped or difficult-to-maintain turf areas can be converted to beds of low-water perennials or groundcovers – with turf irrigation heads being converted to drip irrigation. These solutions to “stupid turf areas” may not be easy, quick or inexpensive, but the end result of creating beautiful and less water and maintenance-intensive spaces will be worth the time and effort.

If you live in Fort Collins, check out the Xeriscape Incentive Program for ideas on how to convert turf and other water-intensive landscape areas to those requiring less water and maintenance. fcgov.com/utilities/residential/conserves/water-efficiency/xeriscape/incentive-program 🌱



Grow Water Smart: Establishing a Landscape with Water in Mind



by Katie Collins,
Fort Collins Utilities



This year, 2021, marks the sixth year of Fort Collins Utilities' Xeriscape Incentive Program. To date, we have approved and inspected over 220 water-wise xeriscape projects across Fort Collins. Here are the three steps to establish a water-wise landscape:

Start with Water

All plants need water to become established, even natives that originate from the driest parts of our state. How much water? Consider the size of the original plant pot and water that volume each time you irrigate—likely once or twice a week in the first few weeks after planting. For one-gallon pots, water one gallon and so on. If using drip irrigation, customize the size and number of emitters to water the recommended volume in one hour. Check the volume rate printed on the emitter, it is usually measured in gallons per hour (GPH). If you are hand-watering, count the seconds it takes to fill a gallon-size jug with your garden hose. Hold the hose at each plant for the appropriate time.

Calibrate

Watch how your garden responds before and after watering events. If there are some plants that are drying out faster than others,

add an additional or larger drip emitter. If others are getting flooded, goof plug a hole or two. The same applies to hand-watering.

Train the Plants

After the first few weeks through the third year, when plants are likely established, reduce watering frequency. See how low you can go by year three—this could mean once a week or once a month, depending on the plant. Always check the soil moisture before irrigating to avoid overwatering. Consider the following: If a drip irrigation system runs for 15 minutes multiple times a week, the low volume of water stays in the top few inches of soil, incentivizing plant roots to only grow there.

Coincidentally, soil dries out most quickly in this area, causing the need for more frequent irrigation. Instead, water deep and infrequently to encourage roots to grow further into the soil. Deeper roots increase drought tolerance in plants. Once plants are established, enjoy. You have raised them right!

Learn more about the Xeriscape Incentive Program at fcgov.com/xip



events 'n classes

LOVELAND

Ongoing through September 6 » **Online Native Plant Sale**
High Plains Environmental Center, 2698 Bluestem Willow Dr.,
high-plains-environmental-center.square.site

MILLIKEN

August 14 » **Milliken Beef 'n Bean Day**
320 Centennial Dr., 10:00am - 4:00pm, Free admission,
festivalnet.com/44712/Milliken-Colorado/Family-Kids-Festivals/Beef-Bean-Day

WINDSOR

Every Saturday » **Windsor Farmers Market**
Boardwalk Park, 100 N. 5th St., 9:00am - 1:00pm,
Free admission, recreationliveshere.com/213/Farmers-Market

July 21 » **Plant Select® Plant Walk**
Treasure Island Demonstration Garden, 31500 Laku Lake Rd., 10:00am - 11:00am, Free, registration required,
recreationliveshere.com/154/Forestry

August 18 » **Basic Vegetable Gardening Tips**
Treasure Island Demonstration Garden, 31500 Laku Lake Rd., 10:00am - 11:00am, Free, registration required,
recreationliveshere.com/154/Forestry



EVENINGS AT THE GARDENS

Plan your visit at fcgov.com/gardens

Starting in June, join us until 8 p.m. on Wednesday evenings for family-friendly activities, cooler temperatures and 12 acres of botanical beauty at dusk.



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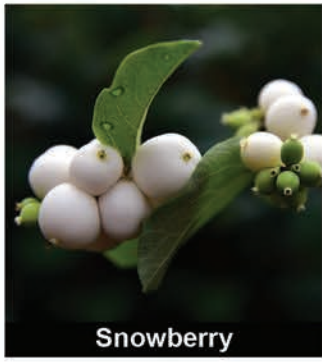
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larimercountyfm.org
970.498.6000

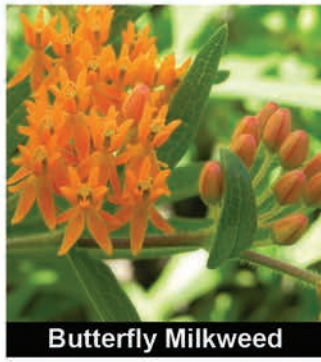


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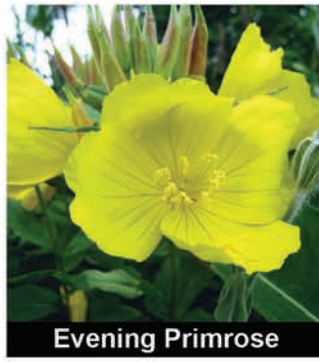




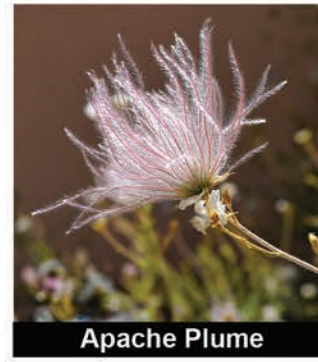
Snowberry



Butterfly Milkweed



Evening Primrose

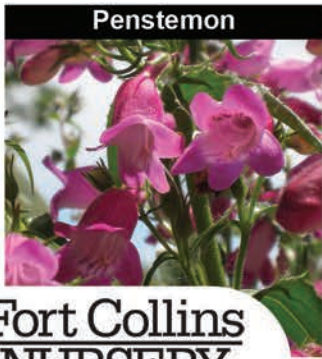


Apache Plume



Serviceberry

Low-water Plant Options for Your Garden



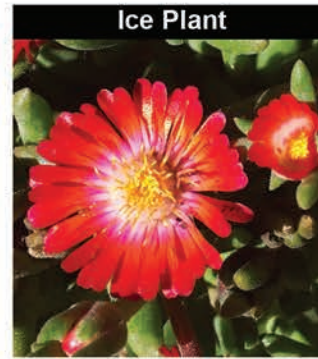
Penstemon



Yarrow



Russian Hawthorn



Ice Plant



Hyssop

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ADD SOME LIFE TO YOUR YARD WITH THE **XERISCAPE INCENTIVE PROGRAM**



This XIP participant upgraded their curb appeal with a mix of shrubs, trees and buffalograss turf.



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STEP 2: Submit your landscape plan for approval

STEP 3: Install the project

STEP 4: Get a rebate

\$0.75/square foot up to 1,000 square feet of area converted from high- to low-water landscape. Get an additional \$0.25/square foot if your plant list is made up of plants native to our region.



fcgov.com/xip
fcgov.com/xeriscape

21-23275 | Auxiliary aids and services are available for persons with disabilities.