

RGA Gardening Fact Sheet #6: Xeriscaping

Gardening enhances our personal and community space. All plants, from trees to flowers, beautify our living area, provide edible food and offer environmental benefits ranging from the oxygen we breathe to creating summer shade to cool our homes. By growing plants, we better appreciate our natural environment and the ecological relationships between soil, water and climate. Gardening helps the young to the young-at-heart understand the responsible use and protection of our natural environment, as well as the impact we have on the “big picture” of environmental stewardship.

With support from the Conexus Credit Union's (CCU) Community Investment Program, the Regina Garden Associates (RGA) at the Regina Floral Conservatory aim to promote environmental stewardship through a series of gardening fact sheets, teaching appreciation of growing plants and basic gardening practices to the general public. Visit the Regina Floral Conservatory often and continue learning about gardening through our fact sheets.

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Xeriscaping & Benefits

Xeriscaping is an environmental stewardship approach to conserving water use in landscaping gardens and lawns. It encompasses a variety of design styles that share a common focus on creating benefits of water conservation; reduced weeding; mowing and use of pesticides; and, cost savings in human time and water use.

Seven Principles of Xeriscaping

- **Planning & Design:** Identify your property needs ranging from screening to colorful perennial beds, create a design to conserve water, and draw up a plan. Zone the property to reflect site locations where plants are grouped by low, moderate and high water needs. Grade the property to direct downspout drainage to planting beds and trees/shrubs.
- **Conditioning Soil:** Assess soil and amend to improve for water holding capability and plant growth. Examples of amendments to Regina heavy clay soils include a loam topsoil, sand, manure compost and peat moss.
- **Appropriate Plant Selection:** Use drought tolerant trees, shrubs, bulbs, vines, grasses, perennial and annual flowers. Consider the plant's mature size, colour, texture and purpose in the design.
- **Practical Lawn Area:** Reducing lawn area and where possible matching to the shape of irrigation will reduce water use. Traditional Kentucky blue grass requires 1.25 to 2.5 cm (0.5 to 1 in. including rainfall) of water per week in spring and fall and up to 2.5 to 4 cm (1 to 1.5 in. including rainfall) of water per week in summer. New Kentucky blue grass cultivars have higher drought tolerance and disease resistance. Reduced lawn area could be replaced with decks and patios, or perennial flower and shrub beds.
- **Efficient Irrigation:** As per design, group plants to watering needs and design an efficient irrigation system to match the plants. Drip irrigation is most water efficient with individual delivery to trees, shrubs and perennial/annual flowering plants. Use an above ground or below ground sprinkler irrigation to cover lawns and where drip line use isn't feasible. Under calm conditions, water early morning hours to reduce evaporation. Stop watering trees and shrubs in September and upon leaf drop. Prior to freeze up do a deep watering.
- **Mulching:** Use an organic mulch of up to 10 cm (4 in.) around plants to reduce weed growth and water use; to cool soil temperature and reduce evaporation; to

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Pygmy Peashrub



Yarrow Flower



Purple leafed Sandcherry

increase nutrient recycling through decomposition; and, to reduce soil erosion and water splash. Examples of organic mulch vary from a coarse layer of wood chips and bark peelings to a fine layer of grass clippings and peat moss. Inorganic mulch like rocks, shale and gravel placed on a landscape fabric are better applied in design elements to help define a focal point of a boulder; to form dry creek bed or; to create a non-vegetated border.

- **Maintenance of the Landscape:** On lawn care or maintenance, water less frequently but more deeply up to 20 cm (8 in) in the root zone and; mow higher at 7.5 cm. (3 in.). To reduce inorganic fertilizer application, use a mulching mower and apply compost. Where needed, organic iron based herbicide is an option for broadleaf weed control. To improve water movement in the root zone and reduce the potential for disease and insect problems, remove thatch if more than 1.3 cm (0.5 in.) in height. As needed, apply mulch annually. Take a proactive approach to reducing plant disease and insect damage. Remove branches with plant diseases of fireblight and black knot. For gardens, attract beneficial insects like ladybugs. To reduce cankerworms on elm, maple and fruit trees, band in spring and fall to control movement of egg-laying female moths. Where needed use spot treatments of low toxicity insecticides such as insecticidal soap and Btk (*Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *kurstaki*).

Sampling of hardy, low-water use Trees for Xeriscaping

Species/Cultivar	Common	Height	Spread	Texture	Form	Foliage/Bark Colour
<i>Acer ginnala</i>	Amur Maple	20'	20'	Fine	Rounded	Green leaves turning orange to red in fall
<i>Elaeagnus angustifolia</i>	Russian Olive	25'	20'	Fine	Rounded	Silver leaves
<i>Picea pungens</i> 'Fat Albert'	Fat Albert Blue Spruce	15'	10'	Average	Pyramidal	Silver-blue needles
<i>Pinus sylvestris</i> 'Fastigiata'	Sentinel Scotch Pine	25'	8'	Average	Columnar	Showy orange bark with green needles

Sampling of hardy, low-water use Shrubs for Xeriscaping

Species/Cultivar	Common	Height	Spread	Texture	Form	Foliage/Bark Colour
<i>Caragana pygmaea</i>	Pygmy Peashrub	3'	4'	Fine	Upright spreading	Green leaves with small yellow flowers
<i>Juniperus sabina</i> 'Calgary Carpet'	Calgary Carpet Juniper	2'	7'	Fine	Low ground arching branches	Lime green needles
<i>Juniperus scopulorum</i> 'Medora'	Medora Juniper	10'	3'	Fine	Columnar	Blue needles
<i>Prunus x cistena</i>	Purple leafed Sandcherry	7'	5'	Average	Upright spreading	Purple leaves turn red in fall; purple branches

Sampling of hardy, low-water use Perennials & Grasses

Species/Cultivar	Common	Height	Spread	Texture	Foliage	Flower	Bloom Period
<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	Yarrow Flower	18"	24"	Fine	Green	Rose-Pink	June-Sept
<i>Festuca ovina</i> 'Elijah Blue'	Elijah Blue Fescue Grass	8"	12"	Fine	Blue	-	-
<i>Paeonia</i> spp.	Peony	12"-4'	6-32"	Average	Green	Various	May-June
<i>Sedum</i> spp.	Stonecrop, Sedum	2-24"	18"+	Coarse	Various	Various	June-Sept