



Designing with Drought-Tolerant Plants

XERISCAPE (from the Greek, *xeri-* = dry) is **NOT ZERO-scape** (few to no plants/lots of rocks). A beautiful garden – full and lush, even, as suits your tastes – can be had with little to no water.

FIRST...

UNDERSTAND OUR MEDITERRANEAN CLIMATE AND ITS PLANTS

NOW...

1. DESIGN BASICS: Planning Your Garden

a. What do you want? A few ideas to start:

- A place to view, or interact with?
- Style: Formal? Informal?
- Patio/entertaining space/grill area?
- Shade?
- Edibles?
- Compost/worm bins?
- Play area for children/pets – lawn?
- Secluded spot for repose?
- Privacy/screening?
- Habitat?
- Rain garden/rain barrels?

b. What do you like?

- Take photos, collect pictures: online, magazines, books.
- Visit gardens featuring drought-tolerant plants to get inspired.
- Patterns will emerge.

c. Who will maintain your garden? What is your maintenance budget? This includes both time & money.

2. DESIGN BASICS: Plant Selection

a. **Microclimate.** Understand your garden's sun and shade patterns, both in summer and winter. Also, consider warmer/cooler areas, soils, wind.

b. **Group plants by cultural needs for success.** Cultural needs include light requirements, water use, and soil type. Plants requiring good drainage will be unhappy in a low spot in heavy clay soil. Right plant, right place.

SUN EXPOSURE

Full Sun	6+ hours sun
Part Sun	4 to 5 hours direct sun
Part Shade	1-2 hours direct sun between 10am and 6pm OR dappled light through day
Shade	Less than 1 hour direct sun

TYPICAL WATER REQUIREMENTS (Source: *Water Use Classification of Landscape Species*; see resources, p. 3.)

High	Bluegrass lawns, birch, coast redwood, annuals, vegetables
Moderate	Fescue lawns, common landscaping trees and shrubs (maple, magnolia, azalea, privet)
Low	Deodar cedar, Chinese pistache, crape myrtle, bottlebrush, lavender, Jerusalem sage
Very Low	California pepper tree, Italian stone pine, olive, manzanita, sticky monkey flower, cacti, succulents



- c. **Seasonality.** Plan for year round interest, paying special attention to what looks good in late summer, fall and winter.
- d. **Consider form, texture, and color,** to achieve balance, unity, and variety.
 - **Form.** How do the overall forms and sizes of the plants interact to make a pleasing combination?
 - **Texture.** Are the leaves small and round? Long and narrow? Smooth? Fuzzy? Think about how various textures can complement each other.
 - **Color.** Monochromatic: greens or grays? Warm colors: reds, oranges, yellows? Cool colors: blues, whites, lavenders? Seasonal flower or leaf color?
 - Note: many drought tolerant plants have leathery, evergreen leaves, small leaves, or gray leaves. Too much of any one element can be difficult to read, blurring together. Think about how the forms, colors and textures will combine and highlight each other.

3. ADDITIONAL TIPS:

- The best time to plant is with the winter rains, NOT in April.
- Resist the temptation to overplant. Understand the plants' mature size, allowing plenty of room for growth. Initially, things may look sparse.
- Take before and after pictures.

RESOURCES – WEB

CLIMATE, SUSTAINABILITY AND WATER CONSERVATION

City of San José: Steps to Sustainable Garden Renovation. An overview of the steps to renovating your garden from determining its function through installation, plus if you need help, how to hire a qualified professional.
<https://www.sanjoseca.gov/home/showdocument?id=1336>

City of Santa Monica Office of Sustainability and the Environment. Garden-garden is a nine-year case study comparing a traditional lawn with a California native garden.
<https://www.smgov.net/Departments/OSE/Categories/Landscape/garden-garden.aspx>

Contra Costa Water District: Gardening in Contra Costa County. Contains a gallery of low-water gardens for front lawn replacement and plant lists as well as information on irrigation and maintenance. Under "Garden Resources" find an introduction to design, and how-to's from designing your garden through installation.
<http://www.contracosta.watersavingplants.com/>

Contra Costa Water District: Lawn to Garden. Information on Lawn to Garden Rebate Program, Design Assistance Program and water conservation workshops.
<https://www.ccwater.com/159/Lawn-to-Garden-Rebate>

East Bay Municipal Water District. Water conservation tips as well as information on lawn conversion rebates.
<https://www.ebmud.com/water/conservation-and-rebates/>

Gardening in Mediterranean Climates Worldwide. Comprehensive website about gardening in Mediterranean climates. Includes climate information, as well as useful lists of plants (including plants suitable for dry shade and clay soil), books, forums, blogs.
<http://www.gimcw.org/>



Grey Water Action. Information and workshops on grey water reuse, rainwater harvesting and composting toilets.
<https://greywateraction.org/>

ReScape California (formerly the Bay-Friendly Landscaping and Gardening Coalition). Free information on how to create sustainable and drought-tolerant gardens, and a search function to help you find Bay-Friendly Qualified landscape professionals.

<https://rescapeca.org/resources/for-communities/>

Also see: <http://rescapeca.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Bay-Friendly-Gardening-Guide.pdf>

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA). Find a licensed landscape architect.

<https://www.asla.org/>

Association of Professional Landscape Designers (APLD). Find a professional landscape designer.

<http://www.apldca.org/>

California Landscape Contractors Association (CLCA). Find a licensed landscape contractor.

<https://www.clca.org/>

Qualified Water Efficient Landscaper (QWEL). Find a certified water efficient landscape contractor.

<https://www.qwel.net/>

PLANT SELECTION AND WATER USE

Calscape. Enter an address or zip code to generate a list of California native plants local to that area. Includes helpful categories such as trees, shade, bird and butterfly, hedges.

<https://www.calscape.com/>

Selectree: A Tree Selection Guide. Right tree, right place. Enter tree attributes (size, sun/shade, Sunset zone, etc.) to generate a list of trees appropriate to the site.

<https://selectree.calpoly.edu/>

Water Use Classification of Landscape Plants (WUCOLS IV). Evaluates water use of over 3,500 ornamental plants by region. Searchable by plant name, water use, region, plant type.

<https://ucanr.edu/sites/WUCOLS/>



RESOURCES – BOOKS

Designing California Native Gardens: The Plant Community Approach to Artful, Ecological Gardens, by Glenn Keator and Alrie Middlebrook (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

Gardens for San Lorenzo by Elizabeth Christine Bailey, et al ([Berkeley, California]: University of California, Berkeley, Landscape Architecture Department, 2014). Includes four designs for front lawn replacements, including plant selections for either sun or part-shade, with how-to pages, plant dictionary and resource list. PDF available at

https://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/envi/2015_SanLorenzo-drought-project.pdf

Landscape Plants for California Gardens: An Illustrated Reference of Plants for California Landscapes, by Bob Perry (Claremont, Calif.: Land Design Pub., 2010).

Mediterranean Gardening: A Waterwise Approach, by Heidi Gildemeister (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

The New Sunset Western Garden Book: The Ultimate Gardening Guide, edited by Kathleen Norris Brenzel (New York, NY: Time Home Entertainment Inc., 2012).

Plants and Landscapes for Summer-Dry Climates of the San Francisco Bay Region, by Nora Harlow ([Oakland, Calif.]: East Bay Municipal Utility District, 2004).

Reimagining the California Lawn: Water-Conserving Plants, Practices, and Designs, by Carol Bornstein, David Fross, and Bart O'Brien (Los Olivos, Calif.: Cachuma Press, 2011).

RESOURCES – PEOPLE

The staff at local nurseries, as well as the gardeners at local botanic gardens and arboreta, are invaluable sources of knowledge and experience with plants.

AND...

The UC Master Gardener Program of Contra Costa County. We're here to answer your gardening questions!

<http://ccmg.ucanr.edu/>

*Prepared/presented by UC Master Gardener Program Coordinator Dawn Kooyumjian
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