

Massachusetts Master Gardener Association

FACT SHEET

Have gardening questions? Contact the **Master Gardener Help Line.**

Two locations / two ways to contact us:

At Mass Hort, Wellesley: mghelpline@masshort.org, 617-933-4929

At Tower Hill Botanic Garden, Boylston: hortline@towerhillbg.org, 608-869-6111 x104

Please visit our web site for Help Line open hours <http://massmastergardeners.org/what-i-do/>



Xeriscapes: Drought-Tolerant Gardens

The word “xeric” is derived from the Greek for “dry.” While water conservation is a major objective, a well designed xeric garden also requires less maintenance, reduces the need for fertilizers and pesticides, and provides important wildlife habitat.

Fortunately, creating a xeriscape doesn’t require turning your property into sand and cactus. Drought tolerance can be achieved by choosing the “right” common garden plants and designing your landscape to minimize the need for water.

PLANT SELECTION

Some plants are just thirsty. To reduce water use, cut back on the number of plants that need lots of water throughout the growing season.

- Let’s start with early-blooming bulbs. What would spring be without daffodils, snowdrops and grape hyacinths? Plants grown from bulbs need water in the spring and fall (when it usually rains in New England) but are unaffected by all but the very driest summers.
- Established perennials such as epimedium, bergenia and hosta thrive in dry shade; and only prolonged drought will stop summer bloomers such as black-eyed Susans and yarrow.
- Once established, some annuals also can tolerate dry conditions.
- On the shrub front, clethra, sumac, snowberry and juniper provide beauty throughout the growing season, be it wet or dry. Established trees such as spruce and oak can withstand even the driest years.
- Consider increasing the ratio of native New England plants to non-natives. Natives have evolved in this climate and are generally more tolerant of regional extremes. An added plus: some natives are low maintenance and deer-resistant. See the plant list on the reverse for examples of plants native to North America, including many New England natives.



GARDEN DESIGN TIPS

Over and above plant selection, how do you approach creating a xeriscape?

- Avoid putting shade-tolerant plants under tree canopies, especially trees with large root systems that will compete for moisture. Shallow-rooted trees such as maples and birches may be less problematic.
- Group plants with similar water requirements together. When you do water, you can adjust the amount accordingly.
- Add compost to the soil when planting. Compost holds water without becoming soggy.
- Keep beds cool and moist by adding two to three inches of mulch. More than this amount will prevent water from penetrating into the soil. Less will allow water to evaporate.
- Weed frequently so that plants don’t need to compete for water.
- Water efficiently, ideally before 9 AM. If you water in mid-day you can lose half to evaporation. Avoid automatic sprinklers but, if you must, shut systems off during rain or after substantial showers. Consider installing drip irrigation and rain barrels to further conserve water.
- Have your soil tested to determine what if any amendments are needed. During periods of drought, fertilize wisely if at all: without adequate water, plants cannot use supplemental nutrients, and applying fertilizer may actually damage roots and scorch leaves.
- Avoid pruning shrubs and trees during a drought, as this will stimulate new growth and increase stress.

With a bit of planning and by following a few simple rules, your xeric garden will be as bright and beautiful as gardens that require more water. And you will be conserving our limited resources and saving yourself money and work. Isn’t that something all gardeners want?

For a list of drought-tolerant plants especially suited to USDA Hardiness Zones 5- 6 please turn over.

The Massachusetts Master Gardener Association is a non-profit organization whose mission is to share knowledge and experience with the public through outreach programs in education, horticulture and gardening; to provide the Master Gardener Training Program to interested members of the public; and to provide graduates of the Master Gardener Training Program with educational and practical opportunities to extend their knowledge and interests in gardening and related topics.

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Xeriscapes – Drought-Tolerant Gardens (cont'd)

Drought-Tolerant Annuals for Zones 5-6

For a complete list go to: <https://ag.umass.edu/landscape/fact-sheets/drought-tolerant-plants-for-landscape>

Common Name	Scientific Name	Common Name	Scientific Name	Common Name	Scientific Name
California poppy	<i>Eschscholzia californica</i>	Gloriosa daisy	<i>Rudbeckia hirta</i>	Spider plant	<i>Cleome</i>
Canna	<i>Canna x generalis</i>	Lantana	<i>Lantana</i> spp.	Statice	<i>Limonium</i> spp.
Cockscomb	<i>Celosia cristata</i>	Marigolds	<i>Tagetes</i> spp.	Strawflower	<i>Helichrysum bracteatum</i>
Cosmos	<i>Cosmos</i>	Moss rose	<i>Portulaca grandiflora</i>	Sunflowers	<i>Helianthus</i> sp.
Dusty miller	<i>Senecio cineraria</i>	Ornamental peppers	<i>Capsicum</i> spp.	Verbena	<i>Verbena</i> spp.
Flowering Tobacco	<i>Nicotiana alata</i>	Petunia	<i>Petunia x hybrida</i>	Wax begonia	<i>Begonia semperflorens</i>
Geranium	<i>Pelargonum x hortatum</i>	Pot marigold	<i>Calendula officinalis</i>	Zinnia	<i>Zinnia</i>

Drought-Tolerant and Tender/Short-Lived Perennials for Zones 5-6

Plants marked with an asterisk (*) are native to North America.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Common Name	Scientific Name
Adam's Needle*	<i>Yucca filamentosa</i>	Montauk Daisy	<i>Chrysanthemum nipponicum</i>
Anise Hyssop*	<i>Agastache foeniculum</i>	Moss Phlox*	<i>Phlox subulata</i>
Barrenwort	<i>Epimedium</i> sp.	Mountain Bluet	<i>Centaurea montana</i>
Basket of Gold	<i>Aurinia saxatilis</i>	Mullein	<i>Verbascum</i> sp.
Bear's Foot Hellebore	<i>Helleborus foetidus</i>	New England Aster*	<i>Symphotrichum novae angliae</i>
Black Eyed Susan*	<i>Rudbeckia fulgida</i>	Oregano	<i>Origanum vulgare</i>
Blanket Flower	<i>Gaillardia x grandiflora</i>	Pinks, Carnations	<i>Dianthus</i> sp .
Blue Fescue	<i>Festuca glauca</i>	Purple Coneflower*	<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>
Blue Star Flower*	<i>Amsonia</i> sp.	Red Valerian	<i>Centranthus ruber</i>
Boltonia*	<i>Boltonia asteroides</i>	Rock Cress	<i>Arabis procurrens</i>
Butterfly Weed*	<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>	Rough Blazing Star*	<i>Liatris aspera</i>
Catnip	<i>Nepeta</i> sp.	Russian Sage	<i>Perovskia atriplicifolia</i>
Christmas Rose	<i>Helleborus niger</i>	Sea Holly	<i>Eryngium</i> sp.
Creeping Phlox*	<i>Phlox stolonifera</i>	Smooth Aster*	<i>Symphotrichum laeve</i>
Cushion Spurge	<i>Euphorbia polychroma</i>	Smooth White Penstemon*	<i>Penstemon digitalis</i>
Daylily	<i>Hemerocallis</i>	Spike Gayfeather*	<i>Liatris spicata</i>
False Blue Indigo*	<i>Baptisia australis</i>	St. John's Wort	<i>Hypericum androsaemum</i>
Globe Thistle	<i>Echinops ritro</i>	Switch grass	<i>Panicum virgatum</i>
Great Solomon's Seal*	<i>Polygonatum commutatum</i>	Threadleaf Coreopsis*	<i>Coreopsis verticillata</i>
Heath Aster*	<i>Symphotrichum ericoides</i>	White Gaura*	<i>Oenothera indheimeri</i>
Hosta	<i>Hosta</i> sp.	Wormwood*	<i>Artemisia ludoviciana</i>
Lamb's Ears	<i>Stachys byzantina</i>	Salvia	<i>Salvia x sylvestris</i>
Lavender	<i>Lavandula</i> sp.	Spurge	<i>Euphorbia dulcis 'Chameleon'</i>
Little bluestem	<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>	Thyme	<i>Thymus</i> sp.
Lenten Rose	<i>Helleborus orientalis hybrids</i>	Yarrow	<i>Achillea</i> sp.