



# SHAWNEE COUNTY EXTENSION

## MASTER GARDENERS

### XERISCAPE DEMONSTRATION GARDEN

#### XERISCAPING

A xeriscape, or low water use garden, is vital in today's world. With our often arid summers, plants that can withstand summer heat with little to no water are essential. Xeriscape gardens help protect our natural resources while also saving homeowners money on water bills and time spent on lawn and garden maintenance. A xeriscape garden uses durable trees, shrubs, flowers and grasses that bring ample beauty with little care. The Shawnee County Extension Master Gardeners' Xeriscape Garden is designed to demonstrate plantings that grow with limited water and attention under our local weather and soil conditions. Please visit the garden, located west of the entrance to the Shawnee County Extension Office at 1740 SW Western Avenue.

#### XERISCAPE PRINCIPLES

Healthy soils help plants tolerate drought! Incorporating composted organic matter into your soil creates more air spaces in the soil. The resulting improved air and water holding capacity is very important for the heavy, tight clay soils that are most common in northeast Kansas. Organic matter also adds nutrients and makes the soil lighter and easier to work. To find out what the organic matter of your soil currently is, and to find out your soil fertility needs and pH, see the [Shawnee County Extension Office](#) for a soil test.

Mulch is a key component to a sustainable xeriscape garden. Organic mulches such as bark chips, wood shavings, or shredded newspaper can be applied in a 1 to 2-inch layer around your plants. Mulches hold in moisture, prevent weed growth, and reduce soil crusting and splashing. Mulches also help keep the soil cooler during hot weather. Organic matter as mulch will slowly work into the soil to further improve soil structure and water retention.

Water is an essential element to all plant life—even in a xeriscape garden. Although xeriscape plants tend to use less water than most, many will still need care, especially in early establishment or times of extreme drought. When watering is needed, pay attention to specific plant needs, rather than watering the entire garden when one plant is stressed. Planting in zones based on the plants' moisture requirements makes watering more efficient. Lawns are more likely to need irrigation and should be irrigated separately from trees and shrubs. When trees and shrubs are irrigated, install systems with drip irrigation or other delivery methods that aim water directly to the soil surface. Any irrigation system that sprays onto sidewalks, roads or tree trunks is inefficient and negates the money and water saving concepts of xeriscape.

## PLANNING AND DESIGN

Develop a landscape plan that takes into account existing topography and features. Design terraces to replace long steep slopes that contribute to run off. Consider a rain garden where downspouts empty into the yard or use a rain barrel to catch and redirect roof run off. Create cooling shade by strategically planting trees or a vine covered arbor. Block hot, drying winds with a hedge of shrubs.

Plan for a more xeric lawn. Although lawns are typically one of the largest water and nutrient guzzlers in your yard, having a low input, beautiful lawn is possible. Bermudagrass, zoysiagrass and buffalograss are all warm-season grasses that require less water than cool-season grasses. Higher mowing heights can improve the drought tolerance of all turf grasses.

## SELECT ADAPTED PLANTS

Chose plants that are known to thrive on the site where they will be planted. Know your soil type and pH and your landscape sun and shade patterns. Also pay close attention to the USDA Hardiness Zone. Shawnee County is in USDA Hardiness Zone 6B.

## FEATURED PLANTS

Shawnee County Extension Master Gardeners' Xeriscape Demonstration Garden has dozens of beautiful plants. Although any of them would be great additions to your yard, here are few of our favorites.

- little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*): The state grass of Kansas! This native grass has season long interest in the garden, with light green foliage and dark flowers in the spring and summer, and coppery colored foliage that holds through the fall and winter.
- yarrow (*Achillea* 'Moonshine'): This drought resistant perennial flower adds a bright pop of yellow to our garden. Other varieties come in an assortment of colors and they are all great pollinator plants!
- blue false indigo (*Baptisia australis*): Blue false indigo is a hardy perennial that sends up bright blue flower spikes in spring. After blooming, it produces seed pods that add an interesting texture to the landscape as well as a soft rustling sound when the wind blows. Blue false indigo is also pollinator friendly.

**K-STATE**  
Research and Extension

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