

Step 1 - Plan and design

Evaluate your current landscape and plan around any barriers. Choose your plants carefully so they will be placed in conditions best for them (shade or sun, type of soil, drainage, etc).

Plan to have water zones within your yard by grouping plants that have the same water needs together. For example, plant high to moderate water consumption plants around the front door or in highly visible areas. Low water consumption areas should take up at least 60% of your landscape and high water use plants should cover no more than 10%.



A large shade tree is a very good idea. It will reduce water evaporation and provide a cool place to sit on hot summer days.

Step 2 - Condition the soil

Both clay soils and sandy soils can be improved to promote water retention and flow. Test a soil sample to determine what nutrients are there and what nutrients need to be added. Tests are available through the Saskatchewan Soils Testing Laboratory at the University of Saskatchewan (966-8370). There is a charge for this service. Testing will help to determine what type of plants to grow and the best fertilizer to use.

Add organic matter to improve the texture of the soil. Composted material is a great source of organic matter and will add nutrients and improve soil texture. Most of Saskatoon has a heavy clay soil and adding organic matter helps lighten the soil, add nutrients and increase the availability of the water that is in the soil for plants to use.



Knowing the topography of your yard is also important. Where are the low spots? Which direction does water run through your yard? Plants that are at the “top of the slope” are going to get less water naturally so low water use plants are ideal for the high areas.

Step 3 - Use turf appropriately



Turf will prevent erosion, provide aesthetic appeal and create a space for you and your family to enjoy outdoors; however it has to be watered quite often to keep it looking its best so use a limited amount of turf in your landscape.

There are many different kinds of turf. Be aware that some types of turf are a lot more drought resistant than others so choose grass species that will thrive in Saskatoon's climate.

Step 4 - Plant selection

The plants you select for your xeriscape should be mainly plants that have low water needs. All types of water needs can be accommodated in your landscape but the high water need plants should be limited. **There are a very wide variety of plants that have low water needs so you do not have to compromise the look you want to create a water efficient landscape.**

Plants that are native to the prairies are more likely to thrive than exotic plants. Grasses like fescues and wheatgrasses are especially adapted to our climate. Location considerations should include:

- soil drainage
- amount of sun or shade
- temperature in the summer and the winter
- wind conditions

Tip: Group together plants that have the same water needs so that irrigation can be done more efficiently.



Step 5 - Irrigation

Every plant needs a different amount of water to thrive. If an irrigation system is to be installed, consider a drip or underground irrigation system to provide water more efficiently. Water any turf separately as it will need more water than the xeriscape plants. Even low water use plants will need irrigation until they are established.

Step 6 - Mulching

Mulching provides a number of benefits including reduced evaporation, minimized weed growth, keeps the roots cool and creates a finished look to the garden.

It is important to select organic mulch (composed of wood chips) to allow the soil to breathe. Inorganic mulches will heat up and radiate heat to the surrounding area increasing the temperature in your yard. As the organic mulch decomposes, it will be adding nutrients to the soil and may occasionally need to be replaced if the plant material doesn't fill in the empty spaces.

The mulch must be at least 10 cm deep to be an effective weed suppressant; however deeper than 15 cm will not allow the soil to breathe and will injure the plant roots.

Do not put down plastic under the mulch because it can kill the useful organisms in the soil.



Step 7 - Maintaining the landscape

A xeriscaped yard means less watering, fewer weeds to pull and less lawn to mow. Minimal maintenance will be needed to keep your yard looking good year after year.