

Today's Xeriscapes are well designed,
built and maintained.

Photo below courtesy Fort Collins Landscaping and
the 2005 Excellence in Landscape Awards

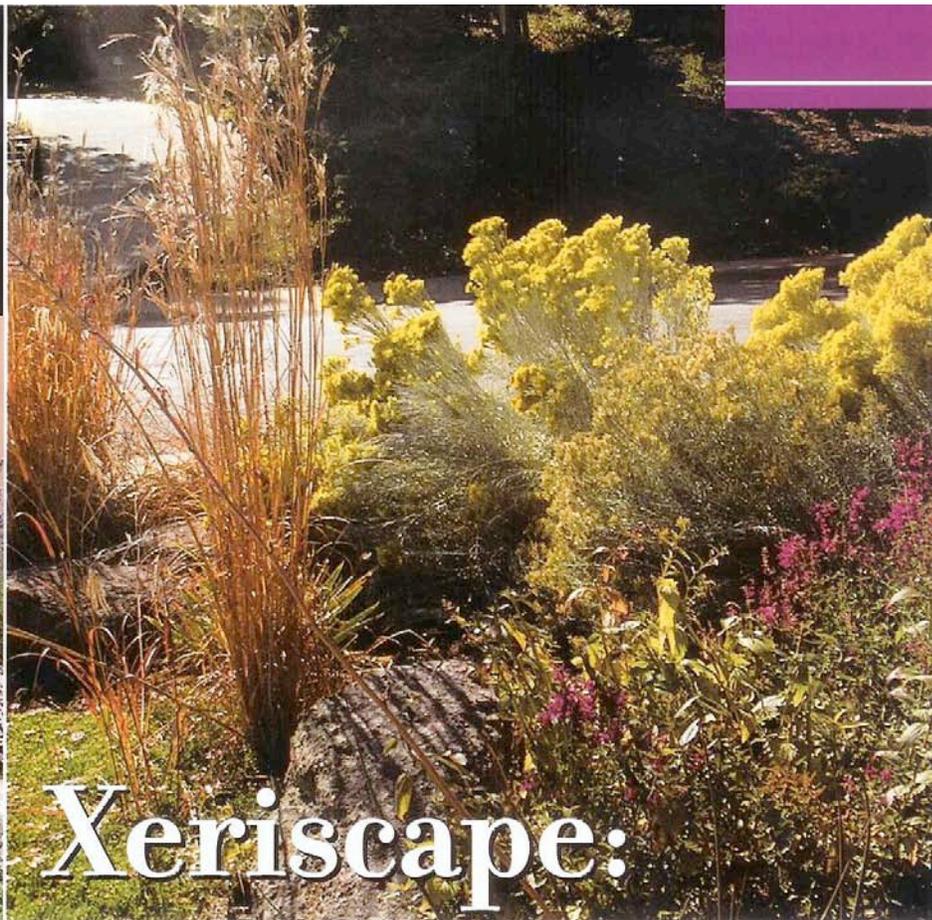
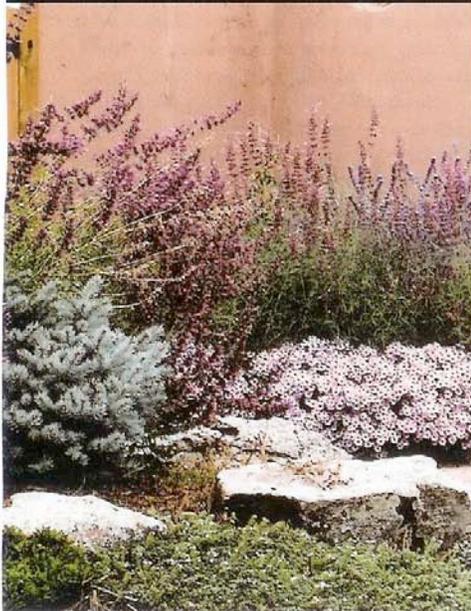


Photo courtesy Matrix Gardens

A generation of wise water use

By Elizabeth Gardener

What have we learned from 25 years of evolving Xeriscape?

One of the keys to celebrating a generation of anything is to reflect on what we've learned. Another key is to continue the vision into the future. In looking back on 25 years of Xeriscape, both the water industry and the landscape industry have learned important lessons.

Xeriscape began as a solution to a landscape problem caused by the dry winter of 1980-81. Through cooperation, donations of money and labor, trial and error and many hours creating publicity and education materials, Xeriscape has grown to an international scope. Wise water use is important around the planet, although for different reasons in different climates.

As explained in *Colorado Green* in 1982, the word "Xeriscape" is "a derivative of 'Xerophyte,' the term used to classify drought-tolerant plants." The year before, ALCC and Denver Water Department had developed a Xeriscape demonstration garden, designed by Don Godi, FASLA, at the department's administration building. The garden was intended to be "a means of showing the public what plantings, materials and supplies can be used to reduce water consumption during the summer irrigation

season," according to Ed Ruetz's *Colorado Green* article. Nearly 500 people attended the first-ever "X-Rated Garden Party" to dedicate the garden.

"Xeriscape grew almost immediately to a multi-state movement," according to Ken Ball, LA, writing in *Colorado Green* in 1998. California and Texas cities adopted programs to reduce water consumption in the face of local supply problems. In 1986 the national Xeriscape Council, Inc., was founded to provide information internationally, and the Front Range Xeriscape Task Force, later Xeriscape Colorado! Inc., also began. By 1998 Xeriscape had appeared on the internet, as well as on a TV series, in a Michael Crichton novel, in Webster's dictionary, in an issue of *Better Homes and Gardens* magazine and in numerous other periodicals, including the *New York Times*.

Since 1998, there have been even more reasons to focus on Xeriscape, specifically, Colorado's drought of 2002-2003 and the Statewide Water Supply Initiative managed by the Colorado Water Conservation Board.

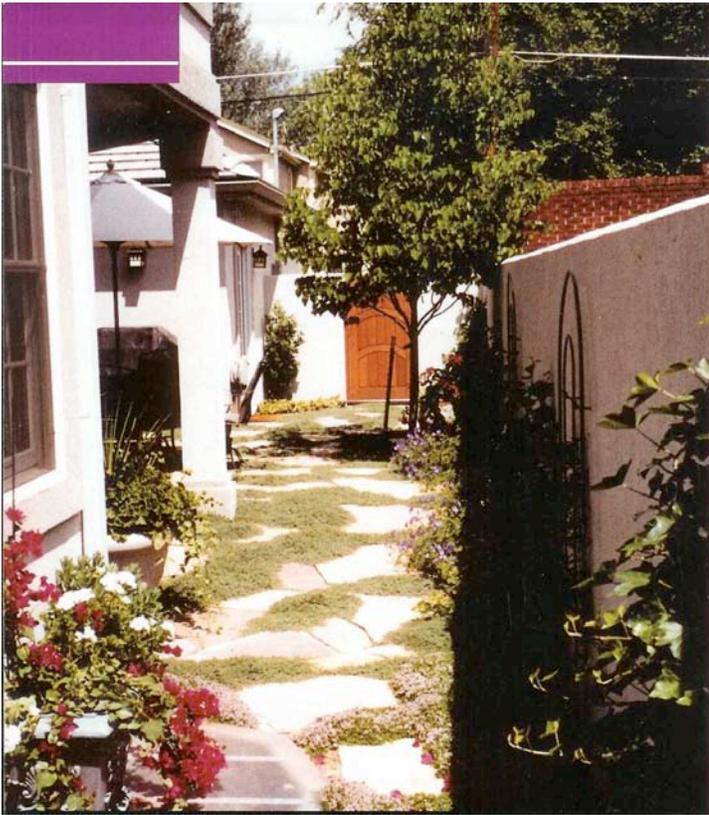


Photo courtesy Nancy Eastman

Colorado Green SPRING 2006

(See <http://cweb.state.co.us/SWSI/Report/Report.htm> for more details.) It's clear that water isn't becoming more plentiful in Colorado. In fact the initial report from SWSI predicts a 20 percent shortfall of water statewide. Xeriscape is one of the best ways to help bridge the gap between available water and water needs.

What have we learned since 1981?

- **Patience:** It takes much longer than anyone imagined to change from wasteful practices, like letting water run off landscapes down gutters, to sound horticultural and water-efficient practices like effectively using every drop.

- **Inter-relationships:** Xeriscape hasn't solved the run-off problem. Now identified by the federal government as a water pollution issue, run-off water from landscapes carries fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides straight from lawns to creeks and rivers. In our region, irrigation runoff and stormwater runoff do not go down the sewers to a wastewater treatment plant. The water goes directly to the streams and then to rivers, causing potential problems for downstream users. We need to solve the runoff issue.

- **Irrigation matters most:** For too many years, we focused on the plants instead of the irrigation of those plants. We need to focus more effort on the water use of everything in the landscape. Some Colorado communities are starting to talk about water budgets or allocations of water per square foot of landscape. This is really the key to efficient water use, but it's not easy to accomplish accurately for each and every property in a given jurisdiction.

- **Maintenance matters, too:** Plant lovers like myself lose sight of the fact that we baby boomers still want flower-intensive yards, but we might not be able to handle the maintenance as we age and retire.