



FLOWERS

Xeriscaping: Garden Flowers

no. 7.231

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Garden flowers provide showy, colorful displays in a xeriscape garden. Xeriscape (zer-i-skap) is a water-conserving landscape. Annuals and perennials can be integrated with shrub borders and groups of trees, or they may be planted in their own beds along fences, walls, walks and patios.

Quick Facts...

A xeriscape is a water-conserving landscape design.

Flowers add color to xeriscape yards and gardens.

Improve soils before planting most flowers.

Soil improvement is easier if only annual flowers are used for the first year or two.

Plant flowers according to site exposure.

Spring-flowering bulbs are drought-evaders and make good flowers for a xeriscape.

Soil Conditions

Before selecting garden flowers, check your soil. Most flowers do poorly in heavy clay, due to lack of oxygen to their roots. Sandy soils may have poor water-holding capacity and be low in available minerals. If either extreme is true in your yard, **do not plant perennial flowers the first year or two.**

Improve the soil with sphagnum peat or compost, available in bales or bags at garden centers. Incorporate 1 cubic foot of sphagnum or compost per 8-by 10-foot area to a depth of 9 inches. Plant only annuals so it will be easier to cultivate and incorporate additional organic matter in the fall, after the plants are killed by frost. Add more sphagnum or compost each year until the soil is easily worked and does not compact. Perennial flowers may then be planted.

Garden Exposure

Select plants that are compatible with the exposure. For north sides of structures or among shrubs, choose plants that tolerate less sun. For example, perennials for a shaded spot might include canterbury bells, primrose and violets. Such plants usually need cool, more consistently moist soils than most garden flowers. They can, nevertheless, be useful in the shaded parts of a xeriscape. Add organic mulches such as wood chips to reduce watering frequency.

Bulbs

Most bulbs do best in full sun, but they must have well-drained soils. Spring-flowering bulbs are well-suited for xeriscape plantings because they are drought-evaders. That is, they grow in the cooler, more moist spring and fall seasons and lie dormant underground during the hot summer months.

Use tulips, grape hyacinths, hyacinths, daffodils and crocus for naturalizing a xeriscape. In fall, plant spring-blooming bulbs in the areas you want them. For more information on bulbs, refer to fact sheets 7.410, *Fall-Planted Bulbs and Corms*, and 7.411, *Spring-Planted Bulbs and Corms*.

Annuals

Almost all annuals commonly sold do well in xeriscape gardens with some soil preparation and no more than one good watering a week (1 to 2 inches). For hot, dry exposures, the most reliable include marigolds, zinnias, cockscomb, sweet alyssum and bachelor's button. Where soils are shaded and cooler, use annuals such as lobelia, pansy and forget-me-not.

Table 1: Perennial plants for shady spots.

Plant Name	Flower Color	Flowering Time	Height (ft)	Remarks
<i>Aconitum napellus</i> Monkshood	Purple	June-Sept.	3 to 4	Use in dense shade.
<i>Anchusa azurea</i> Anchusa (Italian bugloss)	Deep blue	June-July	3 to 5	Tall accent.
<i>Aquilegia</i> spp. Columbine	White, blue, pink, yellow	May-June	1 to 2	Use with shrubs.
<i>Campanula medium</i> Canterbury bells	Pink, purple, white	June-July	3	Tall accent.
<i>Campanula</i> spp. Harebell	Blue, white	June-Oct.	1	Useful edging.
<i>Dicentra spectabilis</i> Bleeding heart	Deep pink	April-June	1 1/2	Use with shrubs, north sides.
<i>Dictamnus albus</i> Gas plant	White, pink	June-July	2 to 3	Use with shrubs.
<i>Iberis sempervirens</i> Candytuft	White	April-June	1	Foliage evergreen.
<i>Lobelia cardinalis</i> Cardinal flower	Bright red	July-Sept.	2	Use in dense shade.
<i>Physostegia virginiana</i> Dragonhead (false)	Lavender, white	Aug.-Sept.	3 to 3 1/2	Aggressive creeper.
<i>Primula</i> spp. Primrose	Yellow, red, blue	April-May	1/2	Showy spring flowers.
<i>Thermopsis rhombifolia</i> Golden banner, false lupine	Yellow	May	1 to 2	Aggressive creeper.
<i>Viola cornuta</i> Horned violet, viola	Various	May-Sept.	1/2	Shade or sun.
<i>Viola odorata</i> Sweet violet	White, purple	April-May	1/2	Aggressive creeper.

Table 2: Perennials for sunny spots.

Plant Name	Flower Color	Flowering Time	Height (ft)	Remarks
* <i>Achillea</i> spp. Yarrow	Yellow, white, pink	July-Sept.	1 to 3	Adapts to very poor soils; fern-like, aromatic foliage.
* <i>Armeria maritima</i> Thrift	Pink	May-Aug.	1	Grass-like foliage.
* <i>Asclepias tuberosa</i> Butterfly weed	Orange	July-Aug.	1 to 1 1/2	Grows in poor soils; very deep-rooted.
<i>Aster novae-angliae</i> Aster (New England)	Purple, white	Sept.	3 to 5	Showy for fall.
<i>Aurinia saxatilis</i> Basket-of-gold	Yellow	April	1	Reseeds readily.
*Cactus (various plant groups) Cactus	Various	May-Aug.	Various	Use in sandy soils.
* <i>Centaurea cyanus</i> Cornflower	Blue, white	May-Sept.	2	Border plant, cut flower.
* <i>Coreopsis lanceolata</i> Coreopsis	Yellow	June-Aug.	3	Easy to grow in most soils.
<i>Delphinium</i> hybrids Delphinium	White, purple, blue	June-July	4 to 6	Tall accent; may need staking.
<i>Dendranthema coccineum</i> Painted daisy	White, pink	May-July	2 to 3	Showy, cut flower.
<i>Dianthus barbatus</i> Sweet William	White, pink, red	May	2	Aggressive biennial.
* <i>Echinacea purpurea</i> Purple coneflower	Yellow, purple	Aug.-Sept.	4 to 6	For tall background.
* <i>Eriogonum umbellatum</i> Sulphur flower	Yellow	May-June	1/2	Grows in poor soils.
* <i>Gaillardia aristata</i> Gaillardia, blanket flower	Red-orange	June-Sept.	2	One of the best for xeriscapes.
<i>Gypsophila paniculata</i> Baby's breath	White	July-Sept.	2 1/2	Lacy, bush-like.

Table 2, continued: Perennials for sunny spots.

Plant Name	Flower Color	Flowering Time	Height (ft)	Remarks
<i>Hemerocallis</i> spp. Daylily	Yellow, red, orange	June-July	2 to 2 1/2	Spreads to large clumps.
* <i>Iris</i> hybrids Bearded iris	Various	May-June	1/2 to 3	Easy to grow.
* <i>Lavandula angustifolia</i> Lavender	Lavender	July-Aug.	1	Fragrant; shrub-like.
<i>Leucanthemum x superbum</i> Shasta daisy	White	July-Aug.	2 to 2 1/2	Useful with shrubs.
* <i>Liatis scariosa</i> Gayfeather	Lavender	July-Sept.	1 to 2	Showy in late summer.
* <i>Linum perenne</i> Blue flax	Blue	May-Sept.	1 1/2	Almost shrub-like.
<i>Lupinus polyphyllus</i> Lupine	Various	June-Aug.	2 1/2 to 3	Good accent with shrubs.
<i>Monarda didyma</i> Beebalm	Red, pink, violet, white	June-July	2 to 3	Best in mass plantings.
<i>Paeonia</i> hybrids Peony	White, pink, red	May-June	2 to 2 1/2	Tolerates some shade.
* <i>Papaver nudicaule</i> Iceland poppy	Orange, red, white, pink	April-June	1	Good edging plant.
* <i>P. orientale</i> Oriental poppy	Orange, salmon, red	May-June	1 1/2 to 2	Aggressive creeper.
* <i>Penstemon</i> spp. Penstemon	Red, white, blue	June-July	2 to 3	Many varieties.
<i>Phlox paniculata</i> Garden phlox	White, lavender, pink	May-July	1 to 1 1/2	Easy to grow.
* <i>Rudbeckia hirta</i> Black-eyed Susan	Yellow	July	2 to 3	Needs space.
* <i>Rudbeckia laciniata</i> 'Hortensiana' Golden glow	Yellow	July-Sept.	5 to 6	Tall, late summer flower.
* <i>Scabiosa caucasica</i> Pincushion flower	Lavender	May-Aug.	1 to 1 1/2	Fern-like foliage.
* <i>Sedum</i> spp. Sedum, stonecrop	Various	May-Sept.	1/2 to 1	Many varieties; succulent foliage.
<i>Veronica spicata</i> Veronica	Purple	May-June	2 to 4	Aggressive creeper.
<i>Viola cornuta</i> Horned violet, viola	Various	May-Sept.	1/2	Shade or sun.
* <i>Zinnia grandiflora</i> Paperflower	Yellow	June-Sept.	1/2	Long-lasting bloom.

*Most drought-enduring.

Rock Gardens

Rock gardens can be an attractive addition to a xeriscape garden. Put them in logical areas such as steep, sunny slopes, rather than as mounds in the middle of a yard. Strive for a natural look and avoid a "rock pile" look or "garden of rock" look. For more information on rock gardens and the plants to use, refer to 7.401, *Rock Garden Plants*.

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