



DROUGHT TOLERANT GARDENING BASICS

Beyond the west and southwest, where average rainfall is often below 10 inches, drought tolerant landscapes offer a solution to areas of the country that have experienced extended periods of drought. With the right plants, you can conserve water and still have a beautiful garden. Even if you are not in the midst of a drought, there may be an area of your landscape or property that has restricted irrigation due to the logistics of getting water to that area. Grouping drought tolerant plants together in these areas is the perfect solution. Here are some things to know.

Drought-Resistant

Falls into the category of Xeriscaping (pronounced Zeer-ih referring to “dry”, and not “Zero” as in “no water”) and consists of plants that can survive with minimal water throughout their daily lives. This group includes native scrub plants, cactus and many succulents. While they survive under these conditions, their beauty is brief and fleeting, generally after a seasonal rain or two, followed by a long dormant period. With the exception of cacti and succulents, most of the plants in this category are not suitable for general, or drought tolerant landscaping.

Drought-Tolerant

Plants (unlike regular landscape plants that need a regular, consistent supply of water to survive) are able to survive with some supplemental, sporadic watering if an occasional natural rainfall can't be relied on. These plants include a wide range of perennials and grasses with not only beautiful blooms in a rainbow of colors but also unique foliage colors and textures. When “drought” and “plants” are used in the same breath, often the first plants that come to mind are cacti and succulents. While they can be part of a drought tolerant scheme, there are many additional choices.

The Number One Killer

Of a drought tolerant landscape program is a simple misunderstanding. Drought tolerant plants are only effective once they have become established. Plants fresh from the nursery only have a root system as large as the pot they were grown in, and that's fine up to that point. In the ground, a drought tolerant plant has a complex, wide reaching root system that allows it to take advantage of every morsel of water that becomes available. This means there is a transitional period of up to six months (if planted during the active growing season) in which the newly placed plants will need regular watering and feeding to allow them time to establish a root system that will allow them the freedom of less water. Once they become established, they offer year after year of water wise beauty to your landscape.

Tips for a Successful Drought-Tolerant Garden:

1. Plan your garden by grouping plants with similar cultural requirements. Place drought-loving plants together to create a low-watering zone in your garden.
2. Site your plants carefully. Drought-tolerant plants will either flop or die in soils that are too rich, have inadequate drainage, or are heavily fertilized. For many plants, it is not the cold but the combination of the wet, water-logged soil with the cold that kills them in the winter. Good drainage is important for drought-tolerant plants.
3. Amend your soil with good organic matter (e.g., compost) before you plant to retain moisture. If you have heavy soil, amend with grit or pea gravel to improve drainage. trowel or an old plastic Pot are great tools when you are working with your soil. When held with the point down, the tool becomes a natural extension of your hand as you dig, weed, or make furrows. It is also great for scooping soil out of bags, pots, and containers.
4. Substitute ground covers in areas where it is difficult to grow turf; particularly shady areas or narrow sections of your yard.
5. Space plants properly so that they do not compete with each other for root space, water, or nutrients.



6. Water wisely. Water early in the morning before the heat of the day to minimize evaporation. Allow nature to do her share; you do not need to water your garden after a heavy rain. Watering by hand at the base of plants, with soaker hoses or with drip irrigation, is highly efficient. Oscillating sprinklers tend to be less efficient, but can be used early in the day.
7. Water deeply and less frequently as opposed to shallow and frequent watering. Deep watering means deeper, more efficient root systems on your plants. Do not water your plants unless they need it. To check, stick your trowel 4 inches into the ground and see if the soil is moist. The rule of thumb is 1 inch per week (approx. ½ gallon per sq. ft.).
8. Mulch your garden not only to suppress weeds, but also to retain moisture. A 2-3 inch layer of mulch is more than sufficient for most areas of your garden. Shredded pine bark, shredded leaves, and fine gravel are three options that provide very different looks.
9. Weed your garden frequently in the spring. Rather than trying to tackle everything at once, spend 15-30 minutes weeding several times a week. In addition to getting the job done, you will be spared of unnecessary back pain and exhaustion. Weeds compete with plants for water and nutrients.
10. Most plants take 1-2 years to establish a good root system. They will need to be watered conscientiously during the first year to establish a healthy root system. Once they are established, you will need to consider your soil conditions (e.g., clay or sandy soil), as well as the temperature and age of the plant when deciding when to water.
11. Do not fertilize water-stressed plants. The salts in the fertilizer will burn the weakened, water-deprived roots.
12. Use water-retaining polymers (e.g., Terra-Sorb™) in your container plantings to absorb and hold water.
13. Look for 'reduced maintenance' cultivars and blends of turf grasses, including Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*) and tall fescue (*Festuca arundinacea*) and fine fescue (*Festuca rubra*) cultivars that have been bred for turf. They tend to have deeper root systems than other turf grasses and will require less water.

Plants for Drought Tolerance

Sunny Dry Conditions

Yarrow (*Achillea*)
 Anise-hyssop (*Agastache*)
 Ornamental onions (*Allium*)
 Golden marguerite (*Anthemis*)
 Sea thrift (*Armeria*)
 Butterfly weed (*Asclepias*)
 False indigo (*Baptisia*)
 Bergenia (*Bergenia*)
 Boltonia (*Boltonia*)
 Calamint (*Calamintha*)
 Coreopsis (*Coreopsis*)
 Sea-kale (*Crambe*)
 Pinks (*Dianthus*)
 Coneflower (*Echinacea*)
 Globe thistle (*Echinops*)
 Sea holly (*Eryngium*)
 Spurge (*Euphorbia*)
 Hardy geranium (*Geranium sanguineum*)
 Blue oat grass (*Helictotrichon*)
 Little blue stem (*Schizachyrium*)
 Switch grass (*Panicum*)
 Mexican feather grass (*Stipa*)
 St. Johns wort (*Hypericum*)
 Candytuft (*Iberis*)
 Bearded Iris (*Iris*)
 Torch lily (*Kniphofia*)
 Lavender (*Lavandula*)
 Gay feathers (*Liatris*)
 Catmint (*Nepeta*)
 Sundrop (*Oenothera*)
 Oregano (*Origanum*)
 Penstemon (*Penstemon*)
 Russian sage (*Perovskia*)
 Ballon flower (*Platycodon*)
 Ornamental sage (*Salvia*)
 Cotton Lavender (*Santolina*)
 Stonecrop (*Sedum*)
 Hens and chicks (*Sempervivum*)
 Goldenrod (*Solidago*)
 Lambs ears (*Stachys*)
 Southern lupine (*Thermopsis*)
 Mullein (*Verbascum*)

Perennials for Dry Shade

Wood aster (*Aster divaricatus*)
 Siberian bugloss (*Brunnera*)
 Barrenwort (*Epimedium*)
 Sweet woodruff (*Galium odoratum*)
 Geranium (*Geranium macrorrhizum*)
 Hellebore (*Helleborus*)
 Turf-lily (*Liriope*)
 Solomon seal (*Polygonatum*)
 Ladys mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*)
 Bergenia (*Bergenia cordifolia*)

Trees and Shrubs for Dry Conditions

Serviceberry (*Amelanchier*)
 Fringe tree (*Chionanthus*)
 Blue mist shrub (*Caryopteris*)
 Smokebush (*Cotinus*)
 Butterfly bush (*Buddleja*)
 Rugosa rose (*Rosa rugosa*)
 Mock-orange (*Philadelphus*)
 Ninebark (*Physocarpus*)
 Beautybush (*Kolkwitzia*)
 Cornelian-cherry (*Cornus mas*)
 Witch-alder (*Fothergilla*)
 American holly (*Ilex opaca*)
 Bushclover (*Lespedeza*)
 Koreanspice viburnum (*Viburnum carlesii*)
 Chaste tree (*Vitex*)
 White pine (*Pinus strobus*)

Annuals for Sunny Dry Conditions

African daisy (*Osteospermum*)
 Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia*)
 Cosmos (*Cosmos*)
 Flowering tobacco (*Nicotiana*)
 Gazania (*Gazania*)
 Geranium (*Pelargonium*)
 Globe amaranth (*Gomphrena*)
 Lantana (*Lantana*)
 Marigold (*Tagetes*)
 Verbena (*Verbena*)
 •Zinnia (*Zinnia*)