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Summer is upon us, and chances are good that we'll have a dry spell before its over. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, of the 26 billion gallons of water consumed daily in the United States, approximately 30% is used for outdoor uses, and the typical suburban lawn consumes 10,000 gallons of water above and beyond rainwater each year. With the lack of rain our area has experienced over the past few years, it's important to try to plant our gardens with flowers that can bloom without excessive irrigation.

The term "xeriscaping" is defined as "quality landscaping that conserves water and protects the environment." Xeriscaping uses water-efficient plants, such as native plants like native azalea or cosmos, which are drought tolerant, in landscaping areas. Combined with mulching and efficient irrigation, xeriscaping designs require less water, conserving the resource and lowering utility bills.

To be most effective, your xeriscape design should take into account climate and soil conditions. Consider the areas of your garden that are wet, very sunny, or shady, and plan plantings appropriately. You can obtain soil-sampling kits from your county Cooperative Extension System office to test your soil for pH, nutrient levels, and other factors.

By choosing native, drought tolerant plants over species which are susceptible to disease, hard to establish, or need frequent attention, you will not only conserve water and reduce the use of fertilizers and pesticides, but also make your garden less labor-intensive. Mulch holds moisture in a garden, reducing the need for frequent irrigation.

Information about native plants and appropriate mulches, as well as other water conservation practices, can be obtained from your county Cooperative Extension System office. For more information about xeriscaping, check out *Water-Efficient Landscaping*:

*Preventing Pollution & Using Resources Wisely* by the Environmental Protection Agency. This publication is available on the World Wide Web at:  
<http://www.epa.gov/npdes/pubs/waterefficiency.pdf>