

OUTDOOR FEATURES

Landscape Design and Plant Selection



Optional Water Efficiency Measure: May contribute to the 30 percent water efficiency requirement, depending on the chosen WaterSense® Approved Certification Method (WACM).



UNDERSTAND

- When designing a landscape, consider factors such as local climate, sun and shade, soil conditions, required maintenance, and intended use to select appropriate plants. Each area of a landscape may have a different ability to support various plant species without the need for supplemental water and fertilizers.
- Once established, many drought-tolerant plants require little water beyond normal rainfall. Because native plants are adapted to local soils and climate, they are more resistant to pests and diseases than other species. See WaterSense's Landscaping Tips web page at www.epa.gov/watersense/landscaping-tips for more information.



BUILD

- **SELECT** plants that are defined as low water use or drought-tolerant for your region. Use regionally appropriate, low-water-using, and/or native plants. These plant species are more likely to be able to survive in the regional climate with minimal, if any, need for supplemental watering. See WaterSense's What to Plant web page at www.epa.gov/watersense/what-plant for more information.
- **PLANT** based on site conditions, such as soil type and exposure to sun and wind. Grouping vegetation with similar watering needs (i.e., hydrozoning) reduces water use by providing plants with their ideal water requirement.



Benefits of Water-Smart Landscaping

The benefits of designing a water-smart landscape include:

- Lower water bills from reduced water use.
- Conservation of natural resources and preservation of habitats for plants, pollinators, and other wildlife, such as fish, birds, and waterfowl.
- Reduced home heating and cooling costs through the careful placement of shade trees and shrubs.
- Reduced runoff of stormwater and irrigation water that carries topsoils, fertilizers, and pesticides into lakes, rivers, and streams.
- Fewer yard trimmings to be managed or landfilled.
- Reduced landscaping labor and maintenance costs.
- Extended life for water resource infrastructure (e.g., reservoirs, treatment plants, groundwater aquifers), which reduces taxpayer costs.



VERIFY

- **DETERMINE** whether there is a landscape design for the property. Use the design to confirm that the correct species were planted in the intended locations.
- **CONFIRM** that plants are suitable options given the landscape and region, if the plants selected for the design were not available at the time of installation.

**NOTE: Consult with the Home Certification Organization for specific verification protocols.*



Water-Smart Landscaping Tips for Turf

How and where turf is placed in the landscape can significantly reduce the amount of irrigation water needed to support the landscape. Lawns require a large amount of supplemental water and generally greater maintenance than other vegetation. Use turf where it has a practical function, such as in play or recreation areas.

Grouping turf areas can increase watering efficiency and significantly reduce evaporative and runoff losses. Select a type of grass that can withstand drought periods and become dormant during hot, dry seasons. Reducing or eliminating turf areas altogether further reduces water use. See WaterSense's Landscaping Tips web page at www.epa.gov/watersense/landscaping-tips for more strategies.

Xeriscaping for Arid Regions

A xeric environment is one that is very dry and has little moisture. Xeriscaping is a form of water-smart landscaping intended for arid and semi-arid regions. It involves selecting xeric plants that thrive in dry conditions and require very little supplemental watering. Incorporating xeriscaping does not mean that the home must be devoid of turf or other water-intensive plants. Different areas can be zoned for different plant types (and irrigation requirements). For example, xeriscaping can be incorporated at the outer edge of the property, while a smaller "oasis" zone intended for play and recreation can be maintained closer to the house. Locating the oasis on the north and east sides of the house will ensure it receives more shade, which reduces irrigation requirements. To learn more, check out *New Mexico's Enchanted Xeriscape Guide* at www.ose.state.nm.us/WUC/LearningXeriscape/XeriscapeGuide_ScreenResolution.pdf.

Additional Resources

The following resources may help with addressing water efficiency during landscape design and plant selection:

- The WaterSense Water Budget Tool can help users plan their landscapes and determine whether it will use an appropriate amount of water for the climate (www.epa.gov/watersense/landscape-water-budget-tool).
- The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center allows users to search for native plants based on their state and other parameters, such as light requirement (www.wildflower.org/plants/).
- The North American Native Plant Society has compiled links for native plant societies in each state (<https://nanps.org/native-plant-societies/>).
- WaterSense's *Water-Smart Landscapes* guide includes daily maintenance tips and step-by-step instructions for achieving a water-efficient landscape (www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2021-12/ws-outdoor-water-smart-landscapes.pdf).
- WaterSense's Additional Outdoor Resources web page offers more resources to reduce outdoor water use (www.epa.gov/watersense/additional-outdoor-resources).



This technical fact sheet is part of EPA's *Technical Reference Manual for WaterSense Labeled Homes*. For the full document and other tools and resources for homes, visit www.epa.gov/watersense/tools-and-resources.

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