



Xeriscaping Solar Week Style

by Kara Csibrik

The key to a successful xeriscape lies in seven steps.

1) Planning and Design

Be sure you know how you want to utilize your landscape and plan accordingly.

2) Soil Improvement

Add compost to soils that are heavy, clay, compacted or lacking topsoil. Organic matter breaks up the soil allowing air and water to penetrate. Your plants will enjoy the extra nutrients and the breathing room.

3) Appropriate Plant Selection

Use low water plants suitable for our climate and group plants according to their water needs. Many varieties are available through local and mail-order nurseries.

4) Practical Turf Areas

Limit high-water use turf areas to functional sizes and locations, such as where the kids and pets like to play. Use native or low-water grass where possible.

5) Efficient Irrigation

Drip irrigation is the most efficient type of irrigation and is easy to use. It can be easily retrofitted to accommodate changing landscapes and is reasonably affordable. If an underground sprinkler system is necessary, make sure to keep it tuned up and look for leaks or broken/damaged equipment.

6) Mulch

Applying a thick layer of mulch around plants will help keep moisture in the soil and will slowly decompose into organic material that is also beneficial to plants.

7) Appropriate Maintenance

Your xeriscape should require minimal maintenance. Maintenance will mostly consist of seasonal dead-heading and weeding.

Proper landscaping is an integral part of creating a sustainably built home.

Creating a xeriscape is a natural choice since xeric plants thrive in arid climates. Proper placing of plants can produce heating and cooling needs and also create habitat for wildlife. As you tour the homes, be sure to take notice of some wonderful landscaping examples that you could incorporate into your own landscape.

The Sunflower House (page 24)

The Sunflower House landscape is made up of entirely native plants.

When visiting the Sunflower House notice:

1) The bench. It's an easy do-it-yourself way to enhance the landscape- and creates a place to sit and admire the surroundings.

2) The simple flagstone walkway.

3) Penstemons. Native, hardy, and many varieties. Try them out for your self.

4) The living fence. Try creating a living fence with xeric vines such as clematis.

Designing for efficiency. Let nature help you!

- Deciduous trees. The Sunflower House uses passive solar techniques. A deciduous tree was planted on the south side of the house to enhance the potential of passive solar. It loses its leaves in the winter allowing the sun to warm the house and will shade the house from the searing heat in the summer.

-Pine trees. Pine trees were planted on the north side of the house and help block the wind in the winter. Make sure you plan for the full height of the tree when planting and don't plant too close to the foundation.

-Sunflowers. You can't go wrong with planting the traditional summer flower, the sunflower. Some varieties are native to our area. If left during the winter, they will provide year round interest, and food for the birds.





Solorado: The Laham Residence (page 34)

When visiting Solorado notice:

The design. There is a lot of height variation in the landscape with larger plants in the back and low spreading groundcovers in the foreground. There is a variety of textures and shapes. Notice upright and airy ornamental grasses, mound forming perennials, and those with variegated foliage. This garden leans toward a pastel flower color palette and blue-green to dark green foliage. Designers often group plants in uneven numbers as it is visually appealing to the human eye. See if you can find this design trick of the trade in this xeriscape.

Solorado is a beautiful example of xeriscaping techniques. It features a sloping landscape design using a variety of plants and "hardscaping" (using solid materials such as rocks or bricks).

The water feature. This stream bed appears to be carrying some spring run-off. Water features, though water consuming due to evaporation loss, tend to still be less water consuming than traditional turf grass.

The hardscape. The sandstone patio leading up to Solorado is a wonderful accent to the landscape and is virtually maintenance free. Materials can be acquired locally. Imagination is your only limit.

The rocks. The designer has created a very natural looking "dry stream" bed. This is an easy way to create interest in the landscape. Weeds can find a nice home among the rocks, so installing a weed barrier or a creeping groundcover that can keep weeds at bay should be considered. Bringing in larger boulders will probably require professional assistance.



Solorado is surrounded by natural vegetation. If your home is surrounded by significant acreage, consider consulting your local extension agent about area natural grasses and help nature along by sowing some extra seed. This is the easiest and most environmental friendly way to deal with landscaping on large properties. It looks beautiful too.



Some tried and tested xeriscape superstars at Solorado:

- a) Prairie Winecups
- b) Yarrow
- c) Creeping Thyme
- d) Day Lily
- e) Ornamental Grasses – If left uncut, ornamental grasses add interest to the landscape in the winter. They can be cut to the ground in the spring to prepare for new growth.

The Jones Home (page 10)

The Jones landscape is a lovely xeriscape on a more moderate scale. Instead of creating slopes or berms, the heights of the plants give dimension to the garden. Also, plants are grouped in order to catch the eye.

When visiting the Jones Home notice:

Rocks and simple logs have been scattered amongst the garden giving it a "living desert" feel.

The Jones' have a vegetable garden. This is an example of hydro-zoning. These plants definitely need more water than the front xeriscape. They are grouped separately and have their own drip irrigation zone.

