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Garden-In-A-Box perfect for Colorado landscapes

Gardening at Altitude
Carol O'Meara For the Camera
Posted: 04/26/2011 11:50:03 AM MDT

Getting a prepackaged garden reminds me of the famous Forrest Gump line "you never know what you're going to get." The lush photographs and cheerful ads all but promise your yard will become paradise if only you'd order the deluxe combinations, personally picked for you and 100,000 other special shoppers.

The trouble is, those kits might be nice in gentler areas, like Ohio, but Colorado conditions smacks those plants with heat, drought, heavy soil and enough wind to blow Dorothy back to Kansas. Only the toughest survive and too often, you're left with gaps in the design that get filled in by bindweed, dandelions or purslane. You never see this in the advertising.

Fortunately for us, the Center for ReSource Conservation, in partnership with the cities of Boulder, Loveland, Longmont, Westminster and Golden, offer a water smart solution: its annual sale of Garden-In-A-Box kits, professionally designed to provide eye popping beauty on a thin water diet. These plant-by-numbers xeriscape gardens are an easy, convenient way to jump into having a garden filled with plants tough enough for the wild, dry west.

In keeping with the CRC's water division's mission to help Colorado residents conserve water, the gardens are custom made by talented designers who live here. Hand-picked for our region's dry conditions, the designs are filled with bold color and eye pleasing textures. They require less than half the water of bluegrass lawns and, according to Colorado WaterWise, can increase property values by up to 15 percent.

"It's important to recognize that xeriscaping does not mean covering your landscape with rocks and cactus, or that you can't have any bluegrass," said Jeff Woodward, CRC's Water Division Director, in a press release. "The key is to come up with a landscape design that will suit your needs while still conserving water. Garden-In-A-Box does just that."

Interested shoppers can choose from three designs: the Sunset Garden, Cool Connections and Garden of Gold. From designer Julie Hauser of Indigo Landscape Design, the Sunset Garden (\$125) is perfect for sunny spots, featuring tough plants that glow with color. Silver Powis Castle Artemesia is beautifully set off by brilliant orange blossoms of Orange Globe Mallow (*Sphaeralcea munroana*) and orange sunrose (*Helianthemum orange*), cheerful, fluted yellow blossoms of mouse-ear coreopsis (*Coreopsis auriculata* Zamphir), plus cool blue spires of Six Hills Giant Catmint (*Nepeta x. faassenii*).

Underscoring this garden is a groundcover combination that bring on a show in fall: Himalayan border jewel (*Persicaria affinis*) and plumbago (*Ceratostigma plumbaginoides*).

If pinwheels of orange and gold are what you desire, check out the Garden of Gold collection (\$80). Designed by Curtis Manning of the Arcadia Design Group, this garden pops with color in summer, then continues the show in fall with seed heads of Echinacea, yarrow, and blue gramma grass. Yellows and golds of coreopsis, Comanche campfire primrose (*Oenothera macrocarpa*), blanket flower (*Gaillardia aristata*) and California poppy (*Artemesia stelleriana*) are gorgeous paired with the deep purple Herrenhausen oregano, baby blue showy fleabane (*Erigeron speciosus*) and purple native verbena (*Verbena bipinnatifida*).

Soothing tones of blues, silver and purple are showcased in the Cool Connections garden (\$125), designed by Julie palmer of the City of Boulder's Parks and Recreation. Hummingbirds and butterflies will be frequent visitors to your yard with this combination of Mojave sage (*Salvia pachyphylla*), Double Bubblemint Hyssop (*Agastache cana*), Firewitch Dianthus (*Dianthus gratianopolitanus*) and Sun daisy Lavender Mist (*Osteospermum spp.*).

The Garden-In-A-Boxes include plants and easy-to-follow planting and care instructions. To make your move to xeriscape complete, the CRC offers drip irrigation kits with individual plant emitters, and water control clocks to turn irrigation on and off automatically.

Gardens can be ordered online at conservationcenter.org or by calling 303-999-3820 ext. 217. Days for pickup vary by location; check the website for details.

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