

Planttalk's Xeriscape Plants

Many flowers enliven xeriscape landscapes. They can be mixed with shrub borders, planted as edgings, or used with mulches as alternatives to turf areas. Perennials and annuals that meet the low-water requirements of xeriscaping are available at most nurseries and Garden centers. Before planting flowers, improve the soil to foster root growth. Locate the Garden in an area that receives sufficient light for flowers. Most perennials and annuals require full sun; only a few will flower in partial shade.

Many perennials are native to the West and are better known as North American wildflowers. Western natives include penstemons which produce red, orange, white, blue and lavender flowers. Other western natives include crimson-flowered beebalm, and red-orange blanket flower.

Purple coneflower, poppy mallow and yellow black-eyed Susan from the Great Plains adapt well here. Other North American natives for xeriscapes include New England aster, perennial flax and gayfeather.

Lavender, iris and red valerian are perennials from the Mediterranean region that work well in Colorado.

Xeriscape perennials that grow well in partial shade include candytuft, columbine, harebell, pansy, gasplant, cardinal flower and golden banner.

But don't forget the annuals. Cosmos, sunflowers, marigolds, globe amaranth, zinnias, moss rose, California poppy, sweet alyssum and bachelor's button are the most reliable flowers for hot, dry exposures. Where soils are shaded and cooler, use annuals such as lobelia, pansy, and forget-me-not.

Planttalk's Ornamental Grasses

Grasses are one of the dominant plants native to the Colorado plains. Native and adapted grasses have recently become a valued addition to Gardens. Ornamental grasses add two important elements to Gardens that no other group of plants can. With the slightest breeze, a Garden with grasses comes alive with movement and sound.

Grasses are adaptable to new areas because they grow better in poorer soils than many other Garden plants. They are available in a variety of heights, colors, textures and water requirements. Grasses are useful in many different types of landscapes and add variety to many sorts of Gardens including rock, wildlife and xeriscape.

Colorado Garden centers and nurseries have increased the availability of xeriscape grasses that grow with little or no supplemental water. Among the shorter types, blue fescue is very popular for its mounds of bright green and blue grass. Native sideoats grama, sand love grass and June grass are also good Garden grasses.

Medium-tall prairie dropseed has a sweet smell and is gold to orange-red in the fall. Little bluestem is a good choice for mountain gardens because of its hardiness. It turns an orange to russet-red color in the fall that lasts well into winter. Other medium-height grasses include Indian ricegrass and blue oat grass.

Planttalk Colorado is sponsored by CSU Cooperative Extension, Denver Botanic Gardens, and the Green Industries of Colorado. For additional information see www.ext.colostate.edu/ptlk