

The Watering Can



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Water "Efficiency"

What a spring and summer it has been! Dry, wet, dry, very dry, drier, and now wet, wet, wet! Welcome to New England gardening.

Did your plants have sufficient water to meet their growth needs? What plants did not do well during the dry periods due to lack of rain? What plants did you have to spend a lot of time watering to keep them alive? Was the natural rain and your current "watering system" sufficient to keep your plants healthy and productive? How many plants had "too much" water and developed disease and disintegrated? Now is the time to make some important decisions for next year about your outdoor watering system to prevent these problems from happening again.

Use xeric-scaping principles to guide the design of your garden. Jennifer Bennett, *Dryland Gardening* (Firefly Books, 2005) has identified the seven principles of xeriscaping:

1. Start With A Plan
2. Minimize Turf Areas
3. Improve The Soil
4. Irrigate Efficiently
5. Select Water-Efficient Plants
6. Use Mulches

Practice Proper Maintenance

While these principles may seem "standard practices," many gardeners frequently "pass over" efficient irrigation and the use of water-efficient plants. Efficient irrigation takes advantage of natural precipitation and supplements the difference between the rain received and the water needed. Start by dividing your property into three "hydro-zones" – (oasis, transition, and xeric zones) to help focus on where water is needed and ignoring those areas where water is not needed.

The "oasis" zone contains water intensive plants (Hint: this should not be your entire property). Use hardy garden perennials, non-xeric ground covers, ornamental grasses, small ornamental trees, annuals, container gardens, and water features. Harvest rainwater from roof & hard areas using rain barrels, cisterns, drip irrigation systems, and transport hoses. (Hint: use the rainwater you harvest. Don't let it sit there to develop water quality issues!). Vegetable gardens are "oasis" plantings and have similar watering needs. Decisions on plants growing in this area should be made now – keep, move, or throw away. Do not continue to grow plants that require too much water, nutrient, or care to survive unless this is a "very special" plant for you. (Hint: Make active decisions about what plants you want to nurture and protect).

The "transition" zone is located in the middle ground areas such as walkways, driveways, fences, and xeric plants. Use drought tolerant perennials, shrubs, shade trees, ornamental grasses and native turf lawns such as fine fescues. In this area, use remaining harvested water for shade trees. Too much natural precipitation or supplemental watering could provide plant problems in this area, and decisions should be made whether to keep plants not doing well in this area.

Finally, the "xeric" zone is the outermost areas along property boundaries and out of the way areas, and uses "xeric" plants ONLY. Use VERY Xeric perennials, shrubs, & ornamental grasses (Hint: See High Country Garden resource below). This area, with the exception of shade trees, should not require and will survive without supplemental watering. Natural rain is all that is required. (Hint: Supplemental watering will cause plant problems).

For more information about planting water efficient landscapes see these resources: High Country Gardens, 800-925-9387 or <http://www.highcountrygardens.com/>; water-saving tips for home and landscaping, <http://www.wateruseitwisely.com/>; or Colorado WaterWise Council - <http://www.xeriscape.org/>. (Hint: Rain barrels are still available for purchase - go to www.rewaterlady.com for information.