

Sustainability Through Xeriscaping

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An evaluation of xeric plants was established at the Dickinson Research Extension Center (DREC) in the spring of 1997. Call it what you will — xeriscaping, water-smart gardening, or environmentally friendly plantings. This water-efficient gardening is being readily adapted by residents of southwest North Dakota. Xeriscaping requires selection of annual and perennial plants, shrubs, trees and vines that perform well in our region and require minimal supplemental irrigation.

Two xeriscape plantings were established at the DREC on June 3, 1997. The xeric planting near the garden included the following plants: Blue Salvia, Purple Salvia, Snow Cap Arabis, Borage, Gypsophila, Dehoides Veronica, Silene Catchfly, Rose Queen Salvia, Lambs Ear, Russian Sage and German Statice.

Each species was randomly replicated three times. Plants were watered at the time of transplanting and for a short adjustment period after planting. Supplemental water was very limited. The xeric plants were mulched with a layer of wood chips.

These plants were evaluated in the fall of 1997. Evaluation was based on ease of establishment, natural beauty, drought and heat tolerance. Receiving the highest evaluations were Russian Sage, Borage and Purple Salvia.

A second xeric planting was established around the DREC sign. Xeric plants were established here because access to supplemental water was difficult. Xeric plants included Purple Coneflower, Russian Sage, Gaillardia, Dragons Blood Sedum, Autumn Joy Sedum, Day Lily, Penstemon, Aster, Lambs Ear, Yarrow, Perennial Geranium and Globe Thistle.

This xeric planting established very well and was a major improvement in the landscape around the DREC sign. This area received a wood mulch over four inches deep, and surprisingly, it was watered only three times during the 1997 growing season. Receiving the highest evaluations in this planting were: Autumn Joy Sedum, Russian Sage, and Gaillardia. However, all plants need to be considered as acceptable xeric plants.

Local residents are readily adapting xeriscape landscaping techniques. All over town, examples of reduced turf areas are prevalent through

the use of xeric plants and organic mulch. As a result, the DREC horticulture advisory council supports the continuation and expansion of xeric plant evaluations. This will be achieved by adding native grasses to our evaluations for use as landscape accent plants.

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