



## Plant a Drought-Tolerant Garden

Choosing drought-resistant plants and following wise cultural practices conserves precious water, uses fewer chemicals and saves time in maintenance, too.

When deciding on a new spot for a drought-tolerant garden, look for one that is out of reach of irrigation systems and away from thirstier plants. Save any naturally moist or shady areas for plants that need those conditions.

Xeriscape gardens are the best choice for hot sunny sites with naturally well-drained soil. As with any garden, soil preparation is critical to the success of the water-wise garden. Before planting the chosen area, remove all grass and weeds and mix in plenty of organic matter.

After planting the garden, be sure to water it deeply. Then cover exposed soil with mulch to help conserve moisture and keep down weeds. If you do need to do some supplement watering, do it early in the day to lessen evaporation and to prevent the spread of disease. Watering deeply encourages plants to form deeper roots so you can go longer between supplemental waterings.

You can have a drought-resistant garden with season-long blooms if you choose some of the following plants that will do well in our northern Illinois gardens:

Start the season with crocus and daffodils. Although they like plenty of moisture early in the season, they go dormant later and need well-drained soil throughout summer making them a perfect fit for a drought-tolerant garden.

Complement spring bulbs with some early blooming perennials. *Aurinia saxatilis*, or basket of gold, is a low-growing spreader for the front of the border. Its gray-green foliage is topped with bright yellow flowers from April into May. Cut plants back by a third after flowering to keep them neat for the remainder of the season.

*Iberis*, or candytuft, is another good choice for the front of the border. It features glossy green, evergreen foliage and cheery white flowers from late April into May. Cut back after flowering for good foliage effect all summer long.



For the middle of the border try *Euphorbia epithimoides*, or cushion spurge. Growing 12 to 18 inches tall, it boasts showy yellow bracts that glow in May to June. In the fall, the bright green foliage turns red.

A great back-of-the-border perennial is Baptisia, or false indigo. Once established, it gets quite large growing 3 to 4 feet tall. It takes the place of a small shrub in the garden. These plants are long lived and deep rooted, so be sure to plant them where they will stay. Their indigo-blue flowers are gorgeous in May and June.

Consider planting some herbs for foliage contrast and for scent. Lavenders, such as Hidcote and Munstead are hardy here. Just give them lots of sun and sharp drainage. Many times of thyme are hardy too – creeping thyme is pretty at the front edge.

Add some annual herbs as well – rosemary, lavendercotton and oregano are just few that like drier, leaner conditions.

The xeriscape garden comes alive in summer.



Achillea, or yarrow, is an easy-to-grow plant with pretty, fern-like foliage. Thriving on lean soil, it keeps producing its flat-headed clusters of bright flowers from June through most of summer if spent flowers are deadheaded.

Another long-blooming perennial is Gaillardia, or blanket flower. Its bright, boldly colored, daisy-like flowers bloom from June through August.

For a delicate touch, plant some Linum, or flax. It has pretty blue flowers from June until August while its blue-green foliage adds a gentle texture to the garden.

Just because a plant doesn't bloom, don't overlook the contribution its foliage can make. Consider Artemisia for its silvery leaves, or add some grasses for a vertical effect. Native grasses are a good choice for a drought-tolerant garden.

Asclepias tuberosa, or butterfly flower, is another native plant that sports bright orange flower heads in July to August, followed by attractive seedpods.

Echinacea, or coneflower, has large, daisy-like flowers that attract butterflies. They bloom from July to September. Purple coneflower is the classic, but many new cultivars have been developed in yellows, oranges, and whites.

Coneflowers are beautiful when planted with Russian sage. The tall, upright silvery foliage of Russian sage is topped with lovely blue flowers.

Plant some Coreopsis for its fine textured, dark green foliage and long summer bloom time. Most varieties bloom in shades of yellow, but there are some pink and coral-colored varieties, too.



Sempervivum, or hens and chicks, are a nice contrast to more upright plants. Rosettes of compact succulent foliage are topped with fuzzy flowers on these small, front-of-the-border plants.

Sedum, or stonecrop, is a succulent that also features showy, long-lasting, star-like flowers. Autumn Joy is the often-planted favorite growing 18 to 24 inches tall and blooming with deep pink flower heads from August to October. There are many other varieties to consider – some with purple-tinted foliage; some with bluish foliage; some small; some tall.

If you yearn for continual color all summer long, add some drought-tolerant annuals, too. Verbena, moss roses and strawflowers are all good choices.

Add a xeriscape garden to your landscape and spend less time watering and more time just enjoying the beauty.



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