



Xeriscaping E-Course

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Welcome to the Xeriscaping E-Course – this is the expanded version of the five part Xeriscaping E-Course online.

Xeriscaping is the new buzz, not only because of the wise use of water, but for the promotion of the use of some great plants (in my humble opinion!).

Learn why I promote this style of gardening, and how it can transmute your landscaping from a high maintenance and demanding style of gardening to a more carefree method with unexpected benefits; wildlife is magnetically attracted to a landscape with rock mulch and stone walls, ponds and butterfly gardens, thyme lawns and xeric plants.

Rock retaining walls are more than just a way of terracing a garden on a hillside; they are also good at providing a little bit of shelter for tiny creatures, and have planting niches and crannies for hardy succulents.

In addition, they can also shade the soil, and retain moisture, as well as create a micro climate; if you look at where the snow leaves first, there is a good chance that it's around a stone wall; the sun warms the rock, which thaws out the ground around it.



See why my gardens built on rocky sandy soil with virtually no irrigation bloom and flourish. I'll share with you my secrets and tips on how you too can create a thriving eco-system. Whether it's called a microcosm or bionetwork, your garden crosses the boundary between managed space and nature with spectacular results.

Garden with nature, not against it with these tips and hints from a Certified Horticulturist.

Find out more about the basics of [Xeriscaping](#) on the website, and see how [wildlife gardening](#) and [water conservation](#) can combine in perfect harmony.

I'll tell you how this all started for me, and maybe it will help you change your high maintenance garden into something a little easier to care for, and less demanding of our most precious resource, water.

I first came to this rocky and sandy hillside in 2000, although I didn't start to garden right away. That came slowly, in stages, as I built my [greenhouse](#) out of local lumber, and then gradually started clearing the area around it to plant stock plants in.

It became clear early on that this was a sandy and acid soil, left behind when the glaciers covered the whole area, and moved boulders the size of houses, and dumped sand and gravel in their wake as they melted. I learned how to utilize them by [landscaping with rocks](#).

In the intervening millennium, many coniferous trees grew, and shed their needles every year on the place.

This has contributed to a soil that leans towards acid, which isn't ideal for many plants.

Look around your garden and try and imagine the forces of nature that contributed to how the soil is, and the lay of the land.

If you live on what was once a lake bottom, such as many parts of the prairies and the Midwest, most likely the soil will be silt or clay.

With luck, grasses grew on the soil, and made a deep black sod, which is ideal for many plants.

If you live near mountains, depending on the type of rock that they're made of this may alter the pH of the soil locally.

Finding out the geological background of your area, and also noting the local plants that are native to the region will go a long way towards your understanding of which plants will thrive in your garden.

The other major aspect of gardening success is what the weather patterns are, and the climate.

If you routinely have good snow cover all winter, with little to no freezing rain or freeze thaw cycles, your choice of plants will be much wider.

Many plants don't like the challenges of the freezing then thawing of a Chinook climate.

Some areas have also been unfortunate to have changes in the climatic patterns that have been the norm for decades, sometimes centuries. There is no guarantee in this era of global warming that your weather won't be affected.

Finding ways of dealing with droughts, unseasonably challenging weather such as freak storms in the summer with golf ball sized hail, or snowstorms with deep snow will become the norm.

What's with these plants?

Fortunately, I've stumbled upon the most fascinating group of plants that can withstand climate change, adversity and challenging conditions.

See more about the plants that I grow in my [Sedum and succulent nursery](#) here. These fascinating [hardy succulents](#) can quickly become an obsession - they are so versatile and reliable that your garden can still look lush and lovely, even without frequent irrigation.

Here I'll talk more about some interesting plants with the ability to adapt to challenging conditions, and why they could be good options for your garden.

Never Enough Thyme...

One of my favorite little ground covers that thrives on dry ground with almost no care are some of the Thymus species.

I've got areas in my garden with absolutely no added nutrients, rocky, sandy soil, yet many thyme varieties love it.

For a great project in a flat area I recommend the lowest of the low, Elfin Thyme. This compact and tiny variety is flat to the ground, only one or two inches tall when in bloom; the bees love it.

A [thyme lawn](#) of Elfin thyme is spectacular in late June and July, and a textured carpet of a pretty blue green the rest of the summer.

Drought tolerant, requiring only a bit of irrigation until established, and possibly a quick tidy with a weed whacker once a year to remove the dead bloom stalks, this is THE best low maintenance ground cover I've ever seen.

There are other thyme species that do a similar job cascading over walls and planted amongst pavers for a lovely soft romantic look.

I recommend Thymus 'Bressingham Pink' which is totally covered in lovely soft mauve flowers in early July; for something really unique how about a variegated gold and dark green type?

This is one of the slower growing varieties, but excels in rockeries; Thymus 'Doone Valley' with its pale pink flowers in June, and undergoes a radical color change in the winter to a glowing red.

Sedum has many names;

Welcome-home-husband-be-he-ever-so-drunk is only one of the many bizzare ways we refer to it.

[Sedum](#), or stonecrop comes in all shapes, sizes and colors. If you don't already have some of this iron clad plant in your garden, get some. It's hands down my most highly prized xeric garden plant.

Reliable, tough and beautiful, what more could you ask? Oh, yes; it does attract many beneficial insects with the blooms from June to September, depending on the varieties.

Butterflies are one of the insects that are attracted to drought tolerant plants – including but not limited to the Great Spangled Fritillary;



You can have flowers in white, pink, yellow and purple almost completely hiding the plant; the flowers are almost hidden by the bees and butterflies they attract for the pollen and nectar.

From my perspective, there is no downside to Sedum. Taller species such as Sedum spectabile 'Autumn Joy' pick up where the lower types leave off, giving us texture, color and valuable overwintering interest and shelter for insects, as well as snow capture in high snow areas.

Find out more about the many kinds of [Sedum plants](#) for your xeriscape garden.

Hardy Rosette Forming Succulents;

So why am I so taken with my favorite hardy rosette forming succulents?

I'm hooked, I admit it. I never would have thought that these plants could be so addictive.

Sempervivum, or the hens and chicks plant is an amazing group of really tough plants, with an appearance so misleading. You would never guess they would be able to withstand drought, complete lack of nutrients in the soil, resist bugs and pests.

Click the picture of the gorgeous Hens and Chicks to find out more;



With a choice spanning tiny miniatures smaller than a dime, to ones the size of a dinner plate, to ones with so much cobwebbing that they seem to be frosted, to those that change color and shape with every season, these incredible plants have something for everyone.

If you are planning a dry garden, these are the plant for you.

They require virtually no care, thriving on neglect and bouncing back from seeming insurmountable drought, cold and horrible conditions.

The only way you can effectively kill these plants is with too much water and poor drainage. See [how to grow them](#) here.

They love well drained soil, especially if it's got some gravel or sand in it, and the perfect place for them is planted in a rock wall, or a crevice garden.

Their roots are interesting, with one long thick taproot to anchor the rosette, and then many fine roots to grab on to a quick rainfall in summer.

The chicks are borne under the hens skirts, and either root beside her to create in some cases an impressive colony, or if they're grown on a longer stolon, tend to fall and be scattered to make a whole new group.

They excel at being planted in mosaics, tapestries and topiaries, and thrive in planters and containers.

There is no negative side to these fascinating plants, except possibly the risk of addiction - you won't be able to resist their charms for long.

I quite often just go and look at my collection, marveling at their wide array of colors, ever changing, and the diverse forms.

That isn't the end of the story, though.

Another seldom seen and highly underused plant is a closely related hardy succulent; Jovibarba.

This genus is now re-grouped under the name of Sempervivum, and there are several different ones, each more beautiful and hardier than the last.

Some of the most interesting, and rare, are Jovibarba heuffelii, which splits at the crown to reproduce. I've grown lots of these from seed, and I'm happy to say that I am in awe of their capable and reliable way of surviving all of the worst of conditions.

The Jovibarba small rosette species which will go un-named here as they're so mixed up, have an interesting characteristic; their propagules grow atop the mature hen on tiny brittle threads, which will dislodge in the slightest movement or breeze to roll away to start a new colony.

Incidentally, this trait of the mother hen producing the baby plants on top has contributed to the survival of the chicks in seasonally wet conditions, as the babies perched on the top of the hen keeps their feet dry and prevents them from rotting, the fate of the mother hen.

See more about [how to grow Jovibarba species](#) here.

Water; the basis of all life;

Conserving water in the Xeric Garden; well, that makes total sense.

Luckily, hardy succulents like Sedum, Sempervivum and Jovibarba require very little water, even to get established.

To get those long taproots on some species going to the deepest layers of the soil makes it essential that the soil they are planted in is moist at first, gradually drying out to make the roots delve deeper to find more.

Click on the picture of Sempervivum marmoratum from Durmitor to see more ways to make your landscape low maintenance;

I recommend planting most of these types of hardy perennials in either the spring or fall, when the soil is still damp from snowmelt in the spring, or after the fall rains.



In the spring, they have time to get established before hot summer days arrive.

In fall, the roots will be active as long as the soil is warm, sometimes well into October in most areas. By the time the growth above the soil is slowed by cooler temperatures, or even frost, the roots have had time to grow deep into the soil.

Fall planting is a good way to get some great deals - many nurseries typically have a sale at the end of the season, with significant discounts; this is the time to shop, and the plants although they may look a little worn out, will recuperate and grow in the spring.

A nice long rest through the winter enables the plant to emerge in the spring with vigor.

I never water my succulents, they survive on whatever nature provides, sometimes going long periods between rains.

I've tested these plants in my conditions, sometimes feeling guilty because they looked so dried out and shriveled, but in all cases, even under the most challenging of dry hot summers, these plants bounce back better than ever.

It's not just that they survive in those kinds of conditions, they thrive in them.

They are made stronger by the demands of this test. I've trialed many different Sedum species, Sempervivum and [Jovibarba](#), and I've been pleasantly surprised and impressed at how much abuse they'll take.

I have noticed that there is one thing that enables them to survive with ease; the use of mulch.

My preference is for [lava rock](#) mulch, which you can buy in bags or bulk in many

larger garden centers.

Although this product is high priced, it's worth it as you seldom need to replace it, simply topping up bare areas with a bit more in the spring.

It keeps weeds down, almost eliminating them or at least making them easier to pull, and also maintains a tiny bit of moisture in the pores and air spaces; as an added bonus, the mulch allows a trickle of nutrients to be released every time it rains.

Lastly, the colour never fades, and it's light to spread.

If you don't like the red color of most lava rock, it's also available in a dark charcoal color, or pale grey.

Alternately, and possibly cheaper in your area is a pebble mulch, or river rock.

I've seen the most gorgeous garden mulched with rock sieved right out of the native soil.

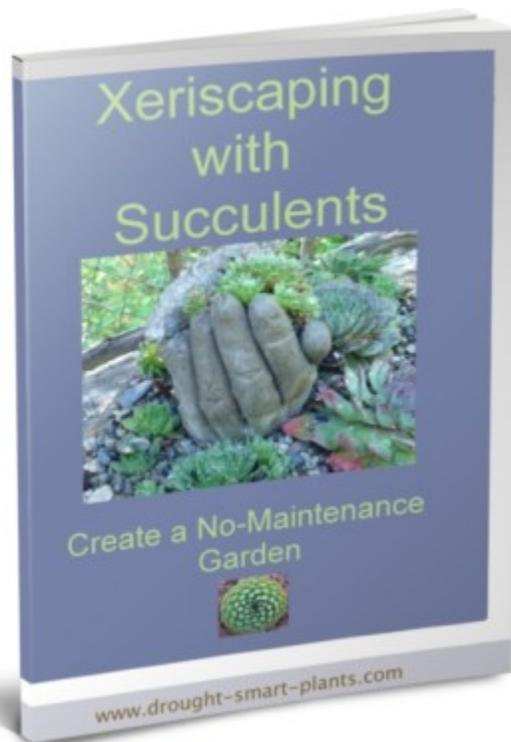
The soil was placed back in the hole, a plant stuck in there, and newspaper or cardboard placed on the top of the bed, and the rocks spread over that. This garden in Ontario, [Keppel Croft](#), is a perfect example of using what you have available to make an exquisite and unusual dry garden.

So, that's it. I hope this e-course has inspired you to get started on making your garden more sustainable, and waterless.

You have nothing to fear; it's a new paradigm, and there is lots of support for this new way of thinking. You CAN have a beautiful, lush garden, even in challenging times.

Still want more?

Buy my Xeriscaping with Succulents E-Book for lots of useful and innovative ways to make your garden low maintenance, drought tolerant, and beautiful; Click on the book:



Start thinking outside the box; if life gives you lemons, make lemonade; or put another way; if nature gives you climate change, take on the challenge of growing a beautiful lush garden even without much water, just by choosing the right plants for your situation.

Speaking of water;

Water control is critical these days, even in areas that formerly were reliably doused in Mother Nature's showers.

To capture rainwater and snowmelt is crucial for success for gardens in droughty areas. If you have a gutter, you have the potential to catch water from even a small roof to use in the garden.

Historically, many areas had cisterns on the rooftop, or buried under the house to keep water from rainy times for times of scarcity. We've lost that mindset in the glut of recent times, and forgotten what our forebears knew.

Utilizing any small amount of salvaged water, whether it's rainwater, greywater or snowmelt, will ease the pressure on artesian wells and underground aquifers. In many areas where it was assumed that the water would never run out, suddenly it's running low, and potentially will be seasonally unreliable, or even disappear altogether.

It behooves each one of us to use the water we do have wisely. No more watering

lawns unnecessarily, and flushing toilets with impunity.

It's becoming more and more important to grow some of our own food, preferably organically, and even with the intensive use of mulches and organic matter added to the soil for moisture retention, vegetables still need additional water to grow and produce well.

As well, storm water storage is becoming essential for erosion mitigation, as we've paved so many areas with concrete and blacktop, making the ground beneath unable to soak up the excess. During storms, runoff can be catastrophic to fish spawning streams and make water downstream unpotable.

What you can do:

Install rain barrels with a spigot to attach a hose to at the bottom, so you can water your garden. Keep a screen or cover on the barrel to prevent mosquitoes from laying their eggs in the stagnant water.

Swale your landscape and plant grasses, Carex species or other groundcovers that don't mind being inundated with water seasonally or periodically to assist in holding the water temporarily. These systems are known as rain gardens and can consist of a rock lined catchment basin with moisture loving plants lining the sides, such as Salix species, ornamental grasses and many others.

Think of installing a larger cistern to capture rainwater for flushing toilets, watering gardens.

Plumb your washing machine and shower to divert the greywater for watering lawns or mulch beds to be used in gardens.

Mulch beds can be a simple planting of cattails (Typha species) or other aquatic rushes, willows (Salix species) or water hyacinth in warmer climates in a gravel bed. Cut the excess growth twice or more times per year to compost or use as mulch on garden beds to retain moisture. Once the water has drained through this type of system, it's safe to use it for ornamental gardens, lawns and trees.

Whatever your small part in salvaging, saving or recycling water, it can count in other ways too. Let other gardeners know what steps you're taking, and start your own aqua coloured revolution!

Don't forget to sign up for [Xeria E-Zine](#) for more every month, and special deals on new products, e-books and contests. Happy Xeric Gardening!