

## Understanding our Changing Climate - Xeriscaping

Over the past few months, Eastern Oregon Climate Change Coalition (EOC3) has been considering ways the organization can be more proactive in our local region. One of the issues we have looked at regards water resources. This has become a major concern in the southwestern area of the US, where water has become a critical issue, with rivers losing water, depleting aquifers, and dry forests resulting in greater and more frequent fires. Lower summer stream flows and declining water tables are happening in our region as well.

Eastern Oregon has for a long time been labeled "the dry side" of our state, and adequate rainfall and irrigation have long been of major importance for local farmers. Cities are continually having to check on the rivers, wells, dams, and aquifers they have depended on for years. In our corner of Eastern Oregon, the water levels in many wells have continued to decline. Some wells are being recharged in the winter, and farmers are finding that droughts seem to be more frequent and more severe. The trend toward droughts is predicted to increase in frequency and severity. And of course, more homes are being built.

While we must stop the current trend of our changing climate, at the same time we must find ways to adapt to these changes to the extent possible. There is a viable, effective change we can make to conserve water in Eastern Oregon. It is to get away from grass water-gulping lawns, and shift to landscaping our yards so they use very little or no water. The practice is known as xeriscaping. For several years now communities in the southwestern US have insisted their citizens use no water on their yards. Many communities in the southwest pay their residents for switching to xeriscaping. Recently Pendleton has increased resident's water bills, as the volume of water needed by the city has gone up.

There are several ways to xeriscape one's yard. The yard can be very attractive, and the cost of xeriscaping can vary considerably. Using plants that are native to our area is one way to provide attractive flowers, shrubs, and trees that can thrive with only the water that drops from the sky. And there are grasses and grass-like plants or seeds available for order and suited for Eastern Oregon, to create a nearly lawn-like yard. Or your yard can be covered with local decorative rock or pebbles, and there are ways to control weeds. Just imagine your yard with lovely flowering plants, trees, and bushes, with no watering and very little maintenance. A good reference is the Oregon State Master Gardener program, <https://extension.oregonstate.edu>.

Xeriscaping provides several benefits. It can significantly lower your water bill. It helps save water for our communities. You can get rid of your mower and reduce your carbon impact. And there is less yard maintenance. For landlords and business owners, there can be savings with less maintenance.

Here are a few tips that may be helpful. Take on one section of yard at a time. Pace yourself. Try a zone defense by grouping plants that require similar maintenance. Convert from sprinklers to drip systems. Consult with an expert, such as staff with the local Master Gardener program, neighbors who have converted, or local contractors with xeriscaping experience.

In the last two months, EOC3 formed a work group to explore the xeriscaping approach. Members of the group have shared experiences and lessons learned, and they had a field trip to look at examples of xeriscaping in the Pendleton area. If you are interested in xeriscaping, and would like to participate on this work group, please contact EOC3 at [eastoregonclimatechange@gmail.com](mailto:eastoregonclimatechange@gmail.com)."

Once people understand the benefits, they tend to go in that direction. With the ongoing drought throughout the West, adaptations such as xeriscaping can be an effective way to cope with our “new normal.”

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