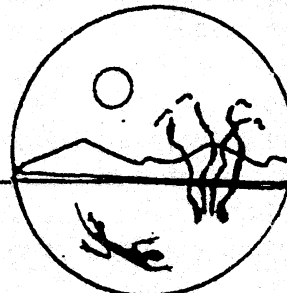


# High on the Desert

Cochise County Master Gardener

## Newsletter



The University of Arizona and U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating.

### PLANT PROFILE-- Salvias!

There are over 900 species of salvias. Commonly called sage, it is a powerful healing plant. The name salvia, from the Latin salvere, means to be in good health, to cure, to save. Plants are low-maintenance and easy to grow, drought tolerant once established, and usually not bothered by insects and diseases. Flowers are tube-shaped with two lips, come in shades of pinks, scarlet, lavenders and true blue that give a long season of color, often from early spring to the first hard frost. Most prefer well drained soil and occasional pruning and supplemental irrigation in the hottest months keeps them looking their best.

Here are a few of my favorite sages.

*Salvia greggii* perhaps the most popular sage found in gardens today. Also known as Autumn sage or Red salvia, it is the first plant to bloom in my garden and when it does the hummingbirds are not far behind! Other colors include white, hot pink, purple, and peach. An evergreen perennial, 2-3 ft high and 3 ft wide.

*S. dorrii* is a spectacular looking plant with intensely fragrant, silver-grey foliage and 1 inch rounded clusters of blue-violet flowers spikes. The dried flower spikes are beautiful in floral arrangements. Low growing shrub, 18 inches by 2 ft.

*S. chamaedryoides* has cobalt blue flowers and silver leaves that are quite striking. Perennial



evergreen that grows to 1 1/2 ft high and 2 ft wide.

*S. clevelandii* is another strongly scented sage. I use the grey-green leaves in pizza and pasta sauces. Flowers are blue-purple with a delightful fragrance that is more pronounced when dried--great for potpourri. Give this plant some room, it can grow 3-5 ft high and wide.

*S. leucantha* has gorgeous, velvety purple flowers with white lips that rise above grey-green, crinkly leaves. Growth is a graceful arching 3-4 ft high.

*S. officinalis* is the good old basic culinary sage but is also a beautiful shrub with deep-throated, mauve-blue flowers. Another favorite is *S. sclarea* (a.k.a. *S. viridis* or horminum) or Clary sage, with

long-lasting lilac flowers.

*S. elegans*, also known as pineapple sage, with scarlet flowers that are a magnet for hummers.

Other uses for sage are teas; making sage vinegar and butter; placing dried leaves in drawers to discourage insects; deodorizing smells with sage smoke; and sage helps combat diarrhea and aids indigestion. As a companion plant with cabbages it repels the white cabbage butterfly and likes carrots and rosemary. And best of all rabbits and deer dislike it!

Salvia--a plant you should get to know.

Cheri Melton  
Master Gardener/Staff Writer

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# The Virtual Gardener— Xeriscape

A search of the Web using the Altavista search engine generates links to 800 documents containing the word *xeriscape*. Among them are many excellent sites offering both information about xeriscaping and images of xeriscaped gardens.

The term *xeriscape* was coined by the Water Department of the City of Denver, Colorado in 1981. The word combines the Greek word *xeros*, meaning *dry*, with the English word *landscape* and refers to landscaping techniques for conserving water. The techniques developed in Denver to cope with drought conditions in 1981 have been widely copied throughout the United States and Canada over the years. Local governments in 40 states and several Canadian provinces now sponsor xeriscape programs. Xeriscaping is popular throughout the arid West, but there are also major programs in places like Hawaii and Florida. As the population has grown, we have become far more aware that water is one of our most precious and scarce resources and xeriscaping can have a major impact on water usage. A study done in Austin, Texas showed that about 25 percent of total domestic water consumption in that area was for landscaping. The study also showed that xeriscaping can reduce the amount of water used for landscaping by up to 50 percent. That means that

xeriscaping can result in a total savings of over 12 percent in overall water consumption.

The seven principles of xeriscaping are:

**1. Planning and Design.** In xeriscaping, as with almost every other endeavor, a good plan is the key to success. A xeriscape design is centered around a concept of grouping plants in zones according to their water requirements. High water users are clustered close around the house in a mini "oasis." Surrounding the oasis is a zone of plants of intermediate water requirements, and at the farthest extremes are the plants with the lowest water requirements.

**2. Limiting Turf Areas.** Turf (AKA "grass") is the largest consumer of water in most yards. Xeriscaping does not mean that you have to do without a lawn altogether, it just means that you have to cut down on the size of the lawn. Consider a lawn as an accent piece in a landscape rather than the background.

**3. Using Efficient Irrigation Techniques.** The old-fashioned techniques of watering plants with sprinklers that send fine streams of water jetting skyward are passé. Modern drip irrigation techniques apply water directly to each plant in the amounts it needs.

**4. Improving the Water-Holding Capacity of the Soil.** Sandy soils dry out too quickly, and clay soils don't absorb water well. The xeriscaper improves the water retention properties of the soil with lots of organic material. This material not only holds water and

releases it slowly to plants, but it also provides nutrients to make plants healthier.

**5. Extensive Use of Mulches.** Tell the average gardener to put mulch around her plants and she will immediately think of organic materials like bark or compost. The xeriscaper knows that rocks can also be used as mulches. Layers of rock look attractive, keep the soil cool and moist, and keep down those pesky weeds that gardeners are always fighting.

**6. Use Plants with Low Water Requirements.** This should be obvious. Xeriscapers like to use native plants in their gardens and yards because they are adapted to the local climate. You can have a few of your favorite plants with bad drinking habits in your oasis, but the intermediate and low water areas should make use of native plants.

**7. Maintenance.** In addition to saving water, a major spin-off benefit of a xeriscaped garden and yard are low maintenance requirements. Now you can spend more time enjoying your landscape and less time slaving over it.

You can find out much more about xeriscaping on the World Wide Web. Some of my favorite Web sites include:

The Coachella Valley Water District pages ([www.arrakis.es/~jmanuel/linkxero.htm](http://www.arrakis.es/~jmanuel/linkxero.htm)) provide not only a wealth of technical information but some really lovely pictures of landscapes and plants. Coachella is not too far from Indio, California and has an annual rainfall of three

(Continued on Page 3)

## Cuttings 'N' Clippings

► The Cochise County Master Gardeners Association meets the first Wednesday of each month at 5:00 pm. Please call the Sierra Vista Cooperative Extension Office for the location. All certified Master Gardeners/Trainees are invited to attend.

► It is very easy to have an "everlasting" Easter lily! Once your plant has finished blooming, you can plant it outside as a hardy perennial that will live for years. Remove the dead flowers and let the foliage die back to nourish the bulb for next year's flowering cycle. It is happiest with the morning sun and afternoon shade.

► Watch for details of an upcoming **Soil and Water Seminar** to be held at The University of Arizona Sierra Vista Campus on May 10. This event, sponsored by the Natural Resource Conservation Service, will offer "hands on" demonstrations and is open to the public.

► Don't take chances—call Blue Stake, 1-800-782-5348, before you dig!

~ ~ ~ ~ ~  
**Friends make  
this earth a  
garden!**  
~ ~ ~ ~ ~

## Arizona Says "NO" To Alfombrilla!

Alfombrilla, a short-lived but highly toxic, perennial range-weed, is native to north-central Mexico. Although it is not known to exist within the United States, it occurs perhaps less than 80 miles South of Arizona's border and 1/4 mile south of New Mexico's border.

This rangeweed invades overgrazed land which may be already stressed by drought conditions. Its toxins (saponins) are extremely poisonous to cattle, sheep, and goats (but not to horses). Symptoms of Alfombrilla poisoning usually include the following stages: loss of appetite, diarrhea, restlessness, arching of animal's back, depression, coma, and death. It is said that less severe cases of poisoning recovery may take about two days.

A non-woody rangeweed, growing from four to ten inches in height, its grey-green, sticky foliage has small, needle-like leaves, with white flowers, and brown, pinhead-sized seeds. Spring and summer rains trigger its blooming seasons.

This plant is a perpetual threat to U.S. rangelands, as its tiny seeds may hitchhike into Arizona on the hooves or hides of Mexican cattle. Even stock trucks and railroad cars may become contaminated with Alfombrilla seeds.

The public's assistance is needed in order to prevent the

outbreak and spread of this highly toxic menace. Please report all suspected weed species to the Arizona Department of Agriculture (Bisbee office: 432-4025).

This article was prepared from literature supplied by the Arizona Department of Agriculture.

*Peggy Dierking  
Master Gardener/Staff Writer*



### The Virtual Gardener Cont'd

inches! These people have to be serious about water conservation.

Another excellent site is Greenbuilder

([www.greenbuilder.com/general/Articles/AAS.xeri.html](http://www.greenbuilder.com/general/Articles/AAS.xeri.html)).

This site from Austin, Texas is filled with useful information about xeriscaping as well as related topics.

One of the few Web sites that has information about plants that can be used for xeriscaping in the high desert is from the State Engineer of New Mexico ([www.thuntek.net/~mccrory/ostfair/xeri/](http://www.thuntek.net/~mccrory/ostfair/xeri/)).

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## Does Your Garden Have A Personality?

I love visiting gardens. Public gardens are a wonderful place to observe what plants look good together, to discover new plants, and seeing what that one gallon stick will look like in a few years! As much as I enjoy public gardens, that's what they are—gardens designed for the public and sometimes they can be generic and void of personality. But private gardens are altogether different. Painstakingly designed by their owners, they reveal a great deal of personality and tastes. I have been fortunate to be able to visit three private gardens and would like to share them with you.

The first garden is located in Elgin and is a Southwestern garden in every sense of the word. The owner is a very busy working mother, wife, and caretaker of many animals. As you would guess, there isn't much time to garden, so a simple, low maintenance, colorful garden was created. Located in the entrance courtyard and backyard patio, it's filled with salvias, Mexican primroses, penstemons, and honeysuckles. The mixture of hot, bright colors liven up the stucco walls. The selected plants are native, drought-tolerant, and maintenance is reduced to occasional weeding, deadheading, and shearing the plants to the ground each fall. They often reseed themselves freely around the yard thus ensuring a colorful show every year. It's a fabulous patio for entertaining as

something is always in bloom from spring through fall.

The second garden is tucked away in the quiet hills of the Dragoons and reminds me of a Victorian garden—Southwestern style! Overflowing with penstemons, various salvias, lilac, Apache plume, Texas rangers, ornamental grasses, a horehound that I covert, among numerous other plants I can't recall, and trees, trees, trees! The plants are tucked away everywhere: up against the house, around the basin of trees, along the fence, and in piles among themselves, and are very lush,

**See back page for information about a Xeriscape garden tour on April 19!**

like a English cottage border, due to the soaker hoses that line the beds. Special features include broken colored glass in hues of purple and green used as mulch and an outdoor covered porch that is filled with wicker furniture and a cozy overstuffed couch. Truly an enticing place. From the couch you can watch the many species of birds that come to feed from an old antique pan filled with seed. After watching the birds and rabbits fitter about I had to run out to the garden to make sure my eyes weren't deceiving me—the pan was set in a heart made of stones!

The last garden is located in the heart of Sierra Vista. At once upon entering the garden, a serene peace fell over me and the garden instantly said

Japanese to me. Filled with an amazing variety of plants that I could not imagine could look so good together, the mainstay of this garden is evergreens. Huge majestic mesquites and an especially striking Argentine mesquite dot the garden. Junipers, cypress, olives, eucalyptus, agaves, cacti, and succulents round out the greenery. Plants that add color are vitex, penstemons, verbena, and yellow bird of paradise. Plants are layered—ground covers, shrubs, and trees and special care has been taken to prune limbs to expose wonderfully colored barks and branch forms. One plant, desert broom, that was beautifully pruned to reveal the striking bark texture caught my eye. A mainstay in Japanese garden are rocks and rocks are also featured in this garden. In all shapes and sizes they are carefully placed along the paths, as mulch in selected areas, and as retaining walls. After a hectic and busy day at work, this is one garden I'd definitely want to retreat to and relax in.

These gardens have been designed to fit into the owners lifestyles and provide them hours of enjoyment. If you are planning a new garden or rethinking your designs for an old garden, consider your lifestyle and create a garden that will best suit you. After all, a garden will provide no enjoyment if it is high maintenance and all you want to do is get into a hammock with a glass of lemonade and enjoy the weather—and your garden.

*Cheri Melton  
Master Gardener/Staff Writer*

## The Agent's Observations

**Q** I have fruit trees and need to fertilize them. What kind and how much fertilizer should I apply?

**A** Of the three macro nutrients—nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium, required by law to be stated on fertilizer packaging, only nitrogen is needed for established fruit trees growing in Cochise County. As the season progresses minor nutrients such as iron and zinc may need to be applied. The amount needed for proper grow is determined by measuring the inches of trunk diameter six inches from the ground. This figure is multiplied by 0.1 pounds of actual nitrogen for apples and pears. For peach, cherry, other stone fruits, and grapes multiply trunk diameter by 0.05 for actual nitrogen requirement. For example: An apple tree has a 4-inch trunk diameter, so it needs 0.4 pounds of actual nitrogen. Ammonium sulfate (21-0-0) contains 21% actual nitrogen or 21 pounds of nitrogen in 100 pounds of fertilizer. Dividing 0.4 by 21% equals 1.9, or just under 2.0 pounds of 21-0-0 fertilizer for the tree in question. I recommend a split application. Apply half the amount now and then

the other half six weeks later because our sandy soils do not hold water and nutrients very well, and they leach through the soil profile out of the root zone. Distribute the fertilizer around the tree drip-line and water in. The same calculations would be made for "organic" fertilizers. Remember that manures usually have only one or two percent nitrogen. For example: using steer manure, a four-inch diameter tree requires 0.4 pounds of nitrogen. Divide 0.4 by 1% equals 40 pounds of steer manure per tree.

For further information refer to: *Backyard Fruit Production in Southeastern Arizona*, Cooperative Extension Publication #9015.

**Q** I want get rid of weed seed and other pests in my garden soil. I have heard of soil sterilization using plastic. How can I do this and is it effective?

**A** This technique, soil solarization, utilizes heat, moisture, and time to reduce certain weeds, fungal diseases, nematodes, and other detrimental soil organisms. A clear polyethylene plastic sheet, several mils thick, is placed over moist, well tilled soil. Dig a shallow trench around the treatment area and place the plastic sheet edges down with soil from the trench. During the summer months with

high temperatures and solar radiation, heat is generated and retained under the plastic. Over time the heat penetrates deeper into the soil profile and temperatures exceed the thermal death point for many organisms. Ideally, plastic should remain in place for six to eight weeks. Water condensing on the plastic sheet is normal. Soil solarization is not soil sterilization, but rather pasteurization. Some tough weed seeds like field bindweed, also called morning glory, will normally not be controlled unless this treatment remains in place for three months. This treatment should be in place during the last of May, June or July because these are the hottest months of the year.

Robert E. Call  
Extension Agent, Horticulture

## Garden Trivia

Cherry tomatoes pack up to twice as much Vitamin C as an equal weight of regular tomatoes.

—Scripps Howard News Service

## April Reminders

Stake new trees  
Plant cool season veggies  
Fertilize  
Prepare for pests

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## **Xeriscape Garden Tour**

**What is xeriscape? Come and find out, Saturday, April 19, from 9:00 am - 1:00 pm. This is a free, low-water use landscape tour (self-guided) sponsored by the Cochise County Master Gardeners Association and The University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Water Wise Program. Three Master Gardener homes in the Sierra Vista area, The University of Arizona Sierra Vista Campus and Sierra Vista City Hall will be featured. View lovely xeriscape medians as you drive from one destination to another. Call The University of Arizona Cooperative Extension at 458-8278, Ext. 141 for a map and description of the sites.**