

# The basics of waterwise landscaping



Utah averages 13 inches of precipitation a year, so water is a precious resource, but we use 50 to 70 percent of our culinary water on landscapes, more than they need. Following these basic principles, you can have a beautiful landscape that thrives on much less.

## Plan ahead



The first step to good landscape design is surveying, that is, measuring and mapping your property.

You may already have a map showing your property boundaries. If not, create your own by measuring between property corners and transferring these dimensions to graph paper.

Next, take stock of your existing yard—from both inside and outside your home. What do you see when you look out your windows?

What would you like to see? Do you have a great view to showcase or an eyesore you'd like to screen out? Want more privacy? What do you want your landscape to do for you? Do you need climate control? More shade in summer or more direct sun on cold winter mornings? Where could you use a patio or sidewalk?

Then, get your ideas down on paper. Start simple, with loose sketches (sometimes called bubble diagrams) of what you want your yard to be. Get more detailed as you go until you know the location of hardscapes and plants that you want.

Remember to group plants together with similar water needs and irrigate them with the same valve so no water is wasted. Landscaping can be costly, so once you have a plan, you can divide it in sections and tackle them when you have the resources.

## Know your soil

Soil types affect the amount and frequency of watering needed by your landscape. Sandy soils drain quickly, but clay soils are just the opposite, draining slowly and sometimes holding too much water. Loam offers the best of



both worlds—water retention and good drainage—making it the most desirable soil type.

You can get a good idea what type of soil you have by squeezing a handful of moist dirt. Loam soils will hold together; clay soils will turn sticky; sandy soils will fall apart. A soil lab can provide a complete analysis, evaluating not only soil type, but also nutrient levels, salt content and pH. All of these factors will help you and your nursery professional decide how to amend your soil and which plants will perform best in your landscape.



## Choose adapted plants

Utah's climate is subject to temperature extremes, low humidity and low precipitation, not to mention alkaline soils. Selecting plants that thrive in these conditions will save you time, money and keep your landscape the envy of the neighborhood and save water at the same time.

You can find details about the plants you want in catalogs, books and through online searches. A comprehensive database can be found on the garden's website at: [ConservationGardenPark.org](http://ConservationGardenPark.org). Bloom time, hardiness zone and mature sizes are all essential information to ensure you have a plant that will bring you long-lasting satisfaction.

## Create practical turf areas

Lawns typically take the blame for wasting more water than any other part of a landscape. But if you right-size turf areas, choose drought-tolerant grass species, and water appropriately, you can still enjoy lawn areas as part of a waterwise landscape.

Turf grasses fall into two major groups. Cool-season species like fescue and bluegrass create a green velvet look, but they demand more water than warm-season species such as blue grama or buffalograss. Warm-season grasses go dormant in early fall and take longer to green up in the spring; however, they need only occasional or no mowing.