Xeriscaping; Fad? Or New Mindset?

Xeriscaping, or building beautiful gardens with very little water, is a new buzz. Using drought smart plants that are beautiful, require little water and are by nature extremely hardy gives gardeners a wide palette to choose from for a xeric garden. And since central Iowa continues to experience drought conditions, you may want to explore this “new” type of gardening in the coming growing season. So what to plant? The ten classic favorite drought-tolerant perennial plants listed below are renowned for their reliability in the dry garden. Tried and tested, these plants are tough, resilient and low maintenance.

1. **Artimesia** species and varieties include Artemisia abrotanum (Southernwood), Artemisia absinthium (Wormwood), Artemisia pontica, Artemisia stellerana, Artemisia schmidtiana (Silvermound), Artemisia canescens, Artemesia ludoviciana (Silver King).

2. **Centranthus ruber** - Jupiter's Beard.

3. **Eryngium**, or Sea Holly; try Eryngium giganteum (Miss Willmott's Ghost) or Eryngium planum (Flat Sea Holly).

4. **Euphorbia polychroma** - Cushion Spurge.

5. **Festuca glauca** - Blue Fescue.

6. **Iris** - bearded Iris dwarf and German bearded irises - lovely in bloom, or out. The blue green sword like foliage is a great foil for other more delicate textures.

7. **Lavendula angustafolia** - lavender - not only a great xeriscaping sub shrub, but a delightfully scented addition to potpourri, as well as a bee magnet.

8. **Nepeta mussinii** - catnip - pretty blue spiky flowers attract many beneficial insects, as well as the odd feline.

9. **Perovskia atriplicifolia** - Russian Sage - there are now some smaller growing types available that don't have the distressing tendency to topple over. Not to worry, these respond well to a severe pruning to make them more bushy.

10. **Salvia** varieties and species; many ornamental sages as well as the culinary one are tough and reliable. Hard pruning in early spring will force new lush growth from the woody stems. Try Salvia argentea (Silver Sage) or Salvia superb.
February 5 & every Saturday through March — Learn on Saturday, Des Moines Botanical Center. Go to http://www.botanicalcenter.com/SubPage.asp?MainLinkID=1 for details.

February 16 — Linn County Master Gardeners’ Winter Gardening Fair. $49 for 4 class sessions (at least six - one hour classes to choose from each session within two tracks), lunch and keynote speaker Pat Stone discussing The Most Important Garden Advice Ever Given. Go to http://www.extension.iastate.edu/linn/news/winter-gardening-fair-2013 for more information.

March 5 – Mahaska County Master Gardeners’ Speaker Series; Mahaska County Extension Office, Grubb’s Premium Popping Corn with Ginger Grubb, 7 PM; no charge and open to the public. Master Gardeners will hold a food drive for the Ecumenical Cupboard.

March 12 – Mahaska County Master Gardeners’ Speaker Series; Mahaska County Extension Office, 7 PM; no charge and open to the public. Polk County Master Gardeners’ Enabling Garden with Paula Winslow & Sandie Hamilton, Polk County Master Gardeners. Master Gardeners will hold a food drive for the Ecumenical Cupboard.

March 19 – Mahaska County Master Gardeners’ Speaker Series; Mahaska County Extension Office, 6:30 PM; no charge and open to the public. Good Agriculture Practices (GAP) webinar with Cathy Strohbehn, Paul Domoto and Angela Shaw. Master Gardeners will hold a food drive for the Ecumenical Cupboard.

March 23 – Southern Iowa Local Foods Conference; Trinity United Methodist Church, Albia, IA. For more information contact Stacie Gibler at 641-932-3547.

March 26 – Mahaska County Master Gardeners’ Speaker Series; Mahaska County Extension Office, 7 PM; no charge and open to the public. To be announced.

April 6 – Knoxville Federated Garden Club’s Annual Garden Gala., Knoxville Fairgrounds, Knoxville, IA. Speakers include Dan Barbec (Spring Garden & Home Decor Trends), Rita Minard (Social Climbers/Clamatis for Every Occasion), and Leanna Culver (Who Needs Blooms?). Master Gardeners will earn 3 CE credits for attending this event. $35, includes lunch. Go to www.extension.iastate.edu/marion for more information. Pre-registration is required. Registration deadline is Wednesday, March 22nd.


Think Spring!! by Dr. Leonard Perry & Dr. Vern Grubinger, University of Vermont

February is a great time to think about the birds. In addition to keeping the feeders full, you can attract them to your yard and garden next spring by building a birdhouse now. There are a few things to keep in mind. First, the size of the entrance must be proportionate to the type of bird you want to attract. You also will need to provide a rough surface both inside and outside the entrance to facilitate access.

In addition, ventilation holes are important. When you put up your birdhouse this spring, be sure to place it at least six feet off the ground to keep cats, raccoons, and other predators away. A protective collar hung just below the birdhouse also deters unwelcome visitors. Plans for building birdhouses are available in many gardening books. Or browse the internet, which is also a source of good information on a number of gardening topics.