



Tucson
Organic
Gardeners

soiling our hands since 1971

Xeriscaping with Herbs

- Mary Sisson Eibs

I recently subscribed to a wonderful publication entitled "Potpourri from Herbal Acres". This newsletter is issued quarterly by Phyllis Shaudys. Those of you who read about herbs will recognize her as the author of *The Pleasure of Herbs and Herbal Treasures*. Each issue of her newsletter is filled with herbal information on subjects such as education, gardening, crafts, aromatherapy, cooking, and much more. I'll include ordering information at the end of this article.

I mention this publication because in Vol. XV, Issue 1 I discovered an article on the use of herbs as xeriscape plants by Father Dominic Garramone, OSB. The article is entitled "Xeriscaping With herbs". Xeriscaping is the process of choosing plants which are compatible with the water conditions of a given area. This is especially important in the deserts of the southwest. The point is to minimize the amount of watering in your herb garden by approximately 30 - 80 %.

Since many herbs are native to the hot, dry, rocky regions of the Mediterranean they are perfectly suited for a xeriscape design. Sage, rosemary, and thyme are examples of some herbs which require minimum amounts of water once established. Fr. Dominic's garden faces south and is surrounded by cement parking lots which creates an extremely hot area for gardening. Because he chooses his plants with these conditions in mind, he never waters his herb garden once the plants are established.

Climates can vary widely from zone to zone in the United States. However xeriscaping is a valuable gardening alternative no matter where your garden is located. Many of you are xeriscaping to some extent right now simply by trial and error. My herb garden consists of primarily drought hardy plants and I watered about once every 2 weeks in the dead of the 1994 summer. I can't remember when I watered last this winter. How, you ask? Remember these two very important words- compost and mulch.

We added about 20 cu. ft. of compost to a 5 x 12 foot area and topped it off with a 3" layer of mulch. I water with a 1/4" soaker hose which is buried beneath the mulch. The garden was dug about 23" deep and is mounded on all 4 sides to form a "bath tub". This garden should have been doomed to failure as it faces southwest, but it was lush and green all summer. It even thrives in the winter with much less sunlight and I've never covered it against the frost.

Here is a list of some of the herbs and flowers Father Dominic suggests for xeriscaping with a few of my own additions. As gardeners, we must be acutely aware of the scarcity of water in our habitat. I hope that you will consider some of these drought hardy herbs when planning your spring herb garden.

- * Bee Balm
- * Lavender
- * Statice
- * Catnip
- * Marjoram
- * Sweet Alyssum
- * Chamomile
- * Oregano
- * Thyme
- * Evening Primrose (in pots only)
- * Rosemary
- * Straw Flowers
- * Globe Amaranth
- * Russian Sage
- * Native S.W. Herbs
- * Lamb's Ears

Write To: Phyllis V. Shaudys
Box 428
Washington Crossing, PA 18977
(for information on Potpourri from Herbal Acres)