

Scottsdale

Scottsdale's xeriscape garden a treat for senses, environment

by **Diana Balazs** - Sept. 29, 2009 03:26 PM
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Bill Casenhiser, a Scottsdale [water conservation specialist](#), likes to go to the city's xeriscape demonstration garden to help collect his thoughts and plan out of his day.

"This is a very relaxing place," Casenhiser said.

The garden is indeed a peaceful respite. The hum of traffic from nearby Hayden Road is only barely audible.

The 5-acre desert haven, which features water-thrifty [desert plants](#), is located in Chaparral Park south of the Chaparral Water Treatment Plant near McDonald and Hayden roads.

City officials hope the public will visit the garden as the weather cools to learn more about desert-adaptive gardening and the advantages of saving water. Self-guided tours are encouraged.

"It gives you an opportunity to see plants as they're developing, so you that you can make good decisions about what you want to have and what you don't want to have," Casenhiser said.

Casenhiser, whose duties include overseeing the maintenance of the garden, said most people mistakenly refer to xeriscape gardening as "zeroscape" gardening.

"That's not what it's about. It's about loading the area with plants in the same way that you would do if you were from any place else, but using the plants that are indigenous to that area," Casenhiser said.

Casenhiser said the garden shows residents how they can reduce water consumption but still maintain a lush landscape. There are signs and kiosks throughout offering tips on desert gardening and water conservation.

Spring in the garden is most spectacular, but there is something showy all year long, Casenhiser said. Plants blooming now include sage, lantana, bird of paradise, orange bells, yellow bells, and Mexican primrose.

"One of the greatest avenues of conservation we can do is with people's landscapes. In our area, as much as 75 percent of the water that a single residence uses is used outside of its house and is landscape," Casenhiser said.

"We have this wide array of desert-adaptive plants that we want people to use, but they never see them because they are use to using the same old things that they always used, kind of the old Phoenix-style landscaping plants - a lot of stuff from California and from the Mediterranean," Casenhiser said. "And you know some of that stuff is good to use and some of it is probably not the right choice for somebody who lives in the desert."

On Tuesdays, Casenhiser oversees [landscapers](#) who weed, prune and otherwise maintain the garden. The goal is to keep the plants looking as natural as possible.

"When we do work in it, we prefer that it doesn't look like we did work in it," Casenhiser said.

The garden is designated as a certified wildlife habitat, attracting hawks, quail, butterflies, desert cottontail rabbits, even coyotes. No [snakes](#) - yet.

The garden also features public art: an environmental sculptural design of terraced planters and walkways giving the illusion of water cascading down a human spine without actual water being used. The work, "Terraced Cascade" by artist Lorna Jordan, also is designed to harvest storm water.

There are about 200 types of plants in the garden, and two still-standing dead trees called snags that serve as a home for two hawks. The hawks, in turn, keep the rabbit population in check.

One area of the garden, featuring plants like creosote that grow naturally in the desert, sits atop an underground reservoir that holds up to 5.5 million gallons of water treated by the nearby Chaparral plant.

The garden also is a favorite of geocachers. There are four geocache sites in the garden. In what is an increasingly popular game, geocachers use a Global Positioning System (GPS) receiver or other techniques to hide and find items known as caches.

"Somebody just saw the garden and said, 'Wow, people need to come and see this'," Casenhiser said.

The Scottsdale xeriscape demonstration garden is open from sunrise to 10:30 p.m. at 5401 N. Hayden Road. Group tours are available by calling 480-312-5660.

Free landscape workshops

Scottsdale's Water Conservation Office offers workshops designed to help residents learn how to use water more efficiently and still have a lush, beautiful landscape. The workshops are held from 6-8:30 p.m. at the Via Linda Senior Center, 10440 E. Via Linda.

Classes scheduled

Date	Subject
Oct. 6	Drip irrigation design and installation. Basic irrigation layout, zoning and pipe sizing.
Oct. 7	Permaculture: the nature of design. Learn how to renovate your landscape by working with natural systems to grow edibles, attract wildlife or simply maintain healthy plants. Tips will be given on how to use rain water and passive solar techniques to reduce indoor cooling costs.
Oct. 8	Plant selection. When choosing new plants, evaluating the plant site is the first step.
Oct. 13	Sprinkler design and installation. Learn how to design, install and maintain a sprinkler system for grass.
Oct. 14	Composting. Learn about desert soils and practical methods for making and using compost in the home garden to improve plant growth and water efficiency.
Oct. 15	Vegetable gardening. Gardening expert and author Mary Irish will cover the basics, techniques, and timetables for success.
Oct. 20	Learn how to maintain, troubleshoot and repair an irrigation system.
Oct. 22	Learn how to adjust and set an irrigation timer during this hands-on workshop.
Oct. 27	Wildflowers. Fall is the perfect time to plant annual wildflower seed for a spectacular spring bloom in your landscape. Get tips for success from Desert Botanical Garden horticulturist Kirti Mathura.
Oct. 29	Potted plants in the landscape. Mathura teaches the basics of choosing pots and appropriate plants, putting them together and successfully caring for them.

More details

Residents can register online at www.scottsdaleaz.gov/water/conservation/workshops.asp, or call 480-312-5690 and leave name, address, phone number, and attendance date. Advanced registration is required for all workshops. Confirmations will be mailed.