

Possible outline: The Cheyenne TM mock orange doesn't need much water to thrive and is one of the smart water use plants on display at the Colorado State University Cooperative Extension's Succulent Plant Demonstration Garden located at the Mesa County Fairgrounds. Photo courtesy Curtis Swift.

Now is the time to consider planting "water-smart" plants  
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One of the best ways to save water outdoors is to plant landscaping that doesn't require constant watering in the Grand Valley's high-desert climate. Fortunately, there are many options to consider when planning a xeric landscape. Of course, there are cactus and yucca. But other succulents such as sedums, ice plants and hen and chicks are beautiful plants that don't require much water. These xeric plants come in all colors, shapes and sizes. You can view examples of these plants here in the Grand Valley, CSU Cooperative Extension Service's Chinle Cactus and Succulent Garden at the Mesa County Fairgrounds.

Many other plants, including the Cheyenne TM mock orange, also require little water once they are established. This plant has intensely fragrant white flowers which measure nearly two inches in diameter. It blooms for a couple of weeks in late spring. Reaching a height and spread of eight feet, this gracious shrub does very well in the xeric landscape. The parent plant of 'Cheyenne' is located at the USDA Field Station in Cheyenne, Wyoming, where it forms a spectacular and carefree specimen which has thrived over many decades with no care.

The 'Cheyenne,' like lilacs and bridal wreath spiraea, should be pruned after blooming as it blooms on the current year's growth. Gangly stems can be removed or cut back to shape the plant as desired. Rejuvenation pruning should be started as this shrub ages to remove any old or damaged canes. It's best to remove them as close to the ground as possible.

Lilacs also do very well in xeriscape shrub borders and beds. While lilacs are often found in well-irrigated landscapes, they are often seen growing on old homesteads where they have received no care or water for many years.

If you like birds, another option for shrubs in a xeric landscape is the Siberian peashrub, which blooms small yellow pea-like flowers in late May. The shrub is loaded with small pea pods into the winter. In addition to being tolerant of low-water sites, the small thorns and abundant seeds are just what small birds need to survive the winter.

When considering new plants for your garden, remember there are many water-smart plants available that grow extremely well in this area. For a more extensive listing of xeric plants, check with your local nursery or the CSU Extension Service office in Grand Junction at 244-1836.

*We live in a semiarid climate where droughts will always be a part of our environment. Water for our future means conserving now. The Drought Response Information Project (DRIP) is a collaboration between the valley's domestic water utilities and CSU Cooperative Extension to provide information and educate the public about drought and the importance of water conservation.*