

**H**OW ABOUT CREATING A SPECTACULAR ROCK GARDEN or Mediterranean-style garden at your home or business?

Ornamental Grasses are low-maintenance and quite drought-tolerant, making them ideal companion plants in the rock or dry garden. ▼

Gardens are soothing to the mind and pleasing to the eye, if designed and planned well. In the Columbia River Gorge, with our dry summers and generally warm autumns, plants need supplemental irrigation to thrive. If you are leaning toward conservative water use and wish to garden with sustainability in mind, a rock or dry garden may be the right choice for you. This garden style will also reward you with a lower summer water bill over time.

### *climate data*

Hood River is at the dividing line between the west and east end of the Gorge and receives a rainfall of approximately 31 inches per year, whereas The Dalles can only count on 13 to 16 inches of annual precipitation. Winters are cool and usually wet.

Eighty percent of the rainfall occurs between November and April.

Summers are frequently warm and dry and lend themselves to spending most of our time outdoors. The weather pattern in the Columbia River Gorge resembles the Mediterranean climate and therefore many of the same plants can be grown that thrive in Southern Europe. Winters can be colder here, however, and plants need to be hardy to USDA Zone 5 to 6, or Sunset Western Garden Zone 3, in Hood River and The Dalles.

Rock or dry gardens are highly suited to the Mid-Columbia, especially the east end of the Gorge.

### *dry gardens*

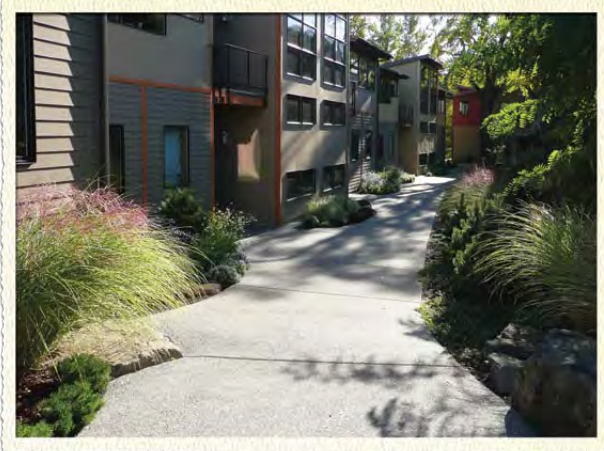
Dry gardens cover a variety of garden styles and may be called Mediterranean or Rock Gardens.

Gravel gardens are another variation of the dry garden. The plants in these gardens are often indigenous to Southern Europe, alpine regions or South Africa. They thrive in drier climates and prefer light, well-drained soil.

Ideally Dry Gardens contain plants that are drought-tolerant once established and are watered modestly during the summer. Winter wetness can be detrimental, therefore good drainage is essential, and fertilizer should be used in moderation. Raised beds or berms promote good drainage. Rocks and boulders are an important feature and provide ideal habitats for alpine plants. Pea gravel can be used as mulch, but is sometimes difficult to keep free of soil and debris.

XERISCAPES are water-wise gardens. The term was derived from the Greek Xeros (dry) and applies to all types of gardens that drastically reduce the need for supplemental irrigation, once plants are

established. Drought-tolerant plants whose natural requirements are appropriate to the local climate are emphasized. Lawn is used sparingly, and if so, grass varieties with low water needs are chosen. It is important to note that Xeriscapes are not zero-irrigation gardens, as is often assumed, and some irrigation, preferably drip, is needed during the hot summer months.



Stock beds at Mount Hood Gardens in early August. Tall grasses and 'Herbstsonne' Rudbeckia form a lush backdrop, with succulent Showy Stonecrop in the foreground. ▶



▲ This rock garden is in its first year and already flourishing. The beds were bermed to enhance drainage and set off the plants.

# Gardens

Marion McNew

## PLANTS FOR DRY GARDENS

Drought-tolerant plants frequently possess hairy or leathery, waxy leaves to protect them from desiccation or they die back early in the summer to bulbs or tubers. Their foliage can be evergreen or evergray, and often profusely aromatic. Many plants originating from dry habitats flower in spring or early summer, providing a colorful display early in the season. Ornamental grasses are quite drought-tolerant and make suitable companion plants in dry gardens, adding fall and early winter interest. Agastache, Lavender, Oregano, Penstemon, Russian Sage, Creeping Thyme and Rosemary are plants of the dry garden, and thrive in the Mid-Columbia, provided they are grown in well-drained soil. Most of the above mentioned plants display flowers attractive to hummingbirds. Pines are drought-tolerant and wintergreen. They come in all sizes, from dwarf, one foot high mounding cultivars to columnar, tall species. These are just a few of the many plants that thrive in a dry or rock garden setting.



Variegated Creeping Stonecrop (*Sedum kamtschaticum* 'Variegatum') and azure-blue Veronica 'Crater Lake Blue' blooming together in early June are examples of colorful and interesting rock garden plants.



▲ An early October photo of the same garden illustrates how bright and colorful rock garden plantings can be, even late in the year.

MEDITERRANEAN-STYLE GARDENS come in all shapes and forms and may be terraced hillsides, cozy courtyard gardens or large landscapes. This is a perfect type of garden for dry, rocky soil in full sun. Interesting, scented foliage and masses of brilliant, persistent flower color in summer evoke memories of Provence and Italy. Mediterranean-style gardens for the most part consist of plants accustomed to hot, dry conditions, and therefore need less supplemental water than many other gardens, once established. Italianate garden features and colorful containers complement this garden style. Fountains or other water features contribute refreshing life and pleasing sound to the garden

*choose the right plants*

No matter what garden style you decide on, it is essential to select plants with similar water needs and growing preferences in one area to reduce maintenance and water use. Thinking in terms of creating plant communities by combining plants originating from similar habitats is a concept gaining ground in the gardening world. It has been practiced in Germany for many years. Establishing an environment for your plants that closely resembles their natural preferences results in improved plant growth and increased pest-and disease-resistance. Dense, healthy plantings cover the ground and reduce weed growth. The chosen plants may be indigenous to our region, but can also be non-native plants with similar growing needs, which adapt successfully to our climate. Invasive species need to be avoided.

Choose plants hardy for your micro climate, right for your soil type, with compact plant habit, attractive texture and / or a long blooming period. Happy plants make gardening fun and boost the gardener's spirit.

Thorough soil preparation using organic amendments and fertilizer will nurture the soil life or soil food web, which in turn will provide nutrients and air channels for the plant roots.

Containers or small rock planters can contain a miniature rock garden. Hen and Chicks are colorful, evergreen and need very little water. ▶



MARION MCNEW is a nationally certified Landscape Designer and licensed Landscape Contractor. She owns Mount Hood Gardens, Inc., a landscape design/build company located in Hood River, Oregon. Mount Hood Gardens has been creating gardens for over twenty years and has gained thorough experience with landscaping and gardening in the Columbia River Gorge, applying organic methods and practices wherever possible.

You can view examples of their work on their website [mounthoodgardens.com](http://mounthoodgardens.com)