

“XERISCAPE LANDSCAPE CONTEST” PROGRAM DESCRIPTION -TUCSON, ARIZONA

INTRODUCTION

The Tucson office of the Arizona Department of Water Resources (ADWR) collaborates with partners and sponsors on an annual Xeriscape Landscaping Contest for the Tucson metropolitan area. The contest promotes the use of native and low-water-use plants, an important aspect of desert appropriate landscaping that promotes water conservation in the community.

Awards are given in recognition of the work of professionals and property owners who have made innovative and appropriate use of native and low-water-use plants, water harvesting, graywater and efficient irrigation systems. The goal is to increase awareness of innovations in water-use efficiency that result in reduced water use, costs and maintenance.

THE XERISCAPE PRINCIPLES include:

- Water conserving design;
- Use of low-water-use drought tolerant plants zoned by water use;
- Reduction of high water using turf or plants;
- Incorporation of rainwater harvesting techniques;
- Appropriate irrigation methods and water efficient scheduling by plant type, site conditions and seasonal water needs;
- Soil improvements and use of mulches to retain soil moisture and reduce evaporation;
- Proper maintenance practices.

STEPS TO IMPLEMENT THE PROGRAM

Step 1: Meet with local groups and organizations to determine interest in promoting water conserving “Xeriscape” landscapes in the community via a contest

- 1) Develop a partnership(s) with a local entity such as a botanical garden or educational entity that promotes low-water use landscaping in the community (e.g. Cooperative Extension, College or University, nonprofit, etc.).
- 2) Determine type of award(s)
 - a. Trophy, plaque, certificate, cash award etc.
 - b. Determine whether the award will be unique (and therefore needs to be designed and produced), purchased from a trophy manufacturer, or developed and produced by partners in-house (e.g. certificate).
- 3) Determine estimated budgetary requirements for the contest
 - a. Awards
 - b. Development and printing of graphics, promotional materials, etc.
 - c. Postage
 - d. Advertising- purchased and/or in-kind
 - e. Judges- breakfast/lunch if visiting sites, per-diem (if unable to get experienced people to volunteer)
 - f. Award ceremony- food, rentals, displays (e.g. photo display of all entries for viewing), water conservation related educational materials to distribute to attendee’s

- 4) Determine which organization will manage the funds for the contest, receive sponsorship and entry fees, pay bills and complete and file any tax reporting documents that might be required. It might be necessary to establish or partner with a nonprofit 501C3 if organizers are unable to manage funds due to company or government restrictions.

Step 2: Secure Sponsorships and raise funds

- 1) Develop sponsor levels and relative recognition per level.
 - a. Establish how many levels there will be and a minimum contribution and range per level, could include in-kind contributions for printing or advertising (newspaper, magazine, TV, radio); award ceremony (food, table/chair rentals, gifts for judges or contest applicants (e.g. free memberships, magazine subscriptions, gift certificates, etc.).
 - b. Establish what each level will be called (e.g. Gold, Silver, Bronze).
 - c. Establish what each level will receive in recognition for their sponsorship (e.g. logo on posters, advertisement, other promotional materials, web site, etc.).
- 2) Solicit sponsors
 - a. Determine what type of organization or business would be supportive of the contest (e.g. nurseries, landscape material suppliers, botanical gardens, irrigation suppliers/manufacturers, local businesses, etc.).
 - b. Send out solicitation letter including information on available sponsorship level packages. Inclusion of a return postcard may speed up response and reduce the need for follow-up letters or phone calls.
 - c. Follow-up with potential sponsors that have not responded a few weeks after initial mailing; pursue additional sponsors if commitments are not meeting budgetary needs.

Step 3: Develop promotional material

- 1) Determine how the contest will be promoted to solicit entries - posters, brochures, print ads, TV and radio spots, mailings to professionals, signage.
- 2) Develop a marketing look for graphic materials, color scheme, artwork, photos to establish a "brand" for the contest that is recognizable and reinforced in as many promotional items as possible.
- 3) Determine how and where materials will be distributed and which will have sponsor recognition (e.g. incorporate sponsors logos). Brainstorm locations that have a connection with landscape professionals and homeowners such as demonstration gardens, nurseries/garden centers, botanical gardens, universities, colleges.

Step 4: Determine eligibility requirements and entry fees

- 1) Meet with partner(s) to determine if there will be entry fees. If so, how much each category will be required to pay per entry.
- 2) Develop entry categories, for example:
Homeowner Category: landscapes must have been substantially designed, installed and maintained by a homeowner. These may include single-family, condominium, town house or manufactured home residences.

Professional Category: landscapes that have been designed by a professional landscape designer, landscape architect, etc. and installed by professional contractors. Categories may include but are not limited to: residential single family with pool; residential single family w/o pool; residential multi-family; model homes; commercial / industrial; public works; development/business park entrances; medians and rights-of-way; neighborhood/community landscape projects; public education projects.

- 3) Entry criteria/requirements- general requirements might include:
- a. The minimum age of the landscape (e.g. must be a minimum of 2 years old to enter)
 - b. The geographical limits of the contest (e.g. within the city limits, metropolitan area, county, etc.)
 - c. Submittal of a list of plants used in the landscape
 - d. Professionals, submittal of:
 - a reduced size landscape and irrigation plan
 - site analysis and/or write-up of special design features
 - areas to be judged if not the entire landscape (e.g. backyard, entry courtyard, business entrance)
 - photos of the landscape (minimum required, maximum allowed)
 - type of photo preferred (e.g. print, digital prints and/or CD with digital photos) for each entry
 - location map
 - contact information
 - e. Homeowners, submittal of:
 - a drawing of yard design (could be optional)
 - write-up of design intent and any special design features
 - photos of the landscape (minimum required, maximum allowed), type of photo preferred (e.g. print, digital prints and/or CD with digital photos for each entry)
 - location map
 - contact information

Step 5: Develop judging criteria that considers all elements of water efficient Xeriscape landscapes, including:

- 1) water conserving design
- 2) use of low-water-use drought tolerant plants zoned by water use
- 3) reduction of high water using turf or plants
- 4) incorporation of rainwater harvesting techniques
- 5) appropriate irrigation methods and water efficient scheduling by plant type, site conditions and seasonal water needs
- 6) soil improvements and use of mulches to retain soil moisture and reduce evaporation
- 7) proper maintenance practices

Special judge's awards could be given for special features in landscapes for example: planted with at least 75% native plants; designed to attract wildlife; a re-vegetation of previously disturbed native area (have applicants provide before and after pictures); a retrofit of a high-water using landscape (have applicants provide before and after photos, if

available, and an estimate of water-use savings); designed to incorporate rainwater harvesting and/or graywater systems, use of mulch or other methods to reduce the use of groundwater for irrigation; a special treatment of a hillside or slope, special water conservation award, etc.

Step 6: Develop entry forms

- 1) Separate entry forms should be developed for homeowner designed landscapes and professionally designed landscapes. Forms should include entry requirements, fees, deadline for entry, when judging will occur, and request contact information, directions/map to site or home. In addition, entry forms should contain contact information for organizers, EIN #, who checks should be made out to for entry fees, and information on where checks should be mailed.
- 2) Send out press release to media list announcing the contest entry forms availability.
- 3) Post entry forms and instructions on websites.

Step 7: Select judges

- 1) Develop a qualifications list for judges
 - a. Judges should have expertise in one or more of the following landscape related categories: horticulture; native and regionally appropriate low-water-use plants; irrigation system efficiency, design and installation; landscape design; municipal planning, education, water conservation, rainwater harvesting, etc.
 - b. Seek judges from local planning departments, cooperative extension offices, landscape design and/or landscape architecture firms (that aren't entering the contest), botanists, water conservation staff from local water companies, or businesses.

Step 8: Plan the judging process

- 1) Determine if the entries will be judged via photographs submitted by applicants, by site visits, or some other method. If it has been determined that judges will visit sites, additional preparation will be required.
- 2) If the contest covers a large geographic area, a caveat might be helpful (e.g. due to time constraints, entries from outlying areas may be judged solely using photographs rather than through a site visit). Determine a day(s) to conduct the judging. This date can be selected months in advance to allow organizers to send solicitation letters in advance to prospective judges to get the date on their calendars. A good rule of thumb is to set the judging day approximately two weeks after the contest deadline to allow time to organize routes.
- 3) Locations of each entry should be plotted on a local street map, locations can be color coded to indicate categories (e.g. homeowner, professional residential, professional commercial, etc.).
- 4) Depending on the number of entries it might be necessary to devise more than one route and split judges into groups of 3-5 per route to evaluate entries. Preferably, the routes would take about the same amount of time to complete to allow judges from all routes to reconvene to determine awards. It is also advisable to have all entries in a particular

category judged by the same group of judges so entries can be evaluated against each other.

- 5) Organizers of the contest should pre-drive each route to find the location of each entry and to note the time and distance between each site, the total time for each route (adding approximately 15- 20 minutes per site for judging; any driving instructions to make them easier to find, and noting the location of a public restroom about mid-way through the route. This pre-planning will save a lot of time on judging day.
- 6) Arrange for vehicles to drive judges on each route, multi-passenger vans work well for this purpose. If organizers do not have their own van(s), companies or others could be approached to supply a vehicle and driver.
- 7) Make sets of copies of all information submitted with entries, plans, landscape write-ups, etc. for each judge for their specific route. Before copies are made, make one copy to use as the master and block out (e.g. white-out) any references to professionals names or company on landscape plans or any documentation that judges will receive so that they will not know who submitted the entry they are judging.
- 8) Arrange each set in the order they will view the entries and put them on clip boards, one set per judge/per route.
- 9) Determine if you want to preview photos of all entries with judges. If so, a power point presentation could be developed to show judges before leaving on their route.

Step 9: Organize the Judging day

- 1) Determine a location and time to meet to review entries, judging criteria, and give instructions to the judges, etc. If the judging starts early and or goes through lunch, food should be provided. Coolers with ice and water should be provided on each van.
- 2) Notify all confirmed judges of the location and time to meet and approximately how long the judging should take, whether you will provide morning coffee and snacks and/or lunch, where to park, etc. If it will be a hot day, advise them to bring a hat and that they should wear comfortable walking shoes.
- 3) Take judges to each site, take photos at each site and ask judges to take photos and/or find a volunteer photographer to take photos of each entry on each route. Photos come in handy if you want to develop a display, send out press releases or develop articles for your website or local publications.
- 4) Reconvene at a pre-determined location to discuss entries and determine awards.

Step 10: Tasks to complete prior to the Awards Ceremony

- 1) Order all awards
- 2) Order refreshments
- 3) Order rentals if applicable (e.g. tables, chairs, tablecloths, Public Address system, etc.)
- 4) Develop a mailing list for the award ceremony, applicants, dignitaries, judges, etc.
- 5) Design, print and mail invitations, request an RSVP if food will be served
- 6) Design and print ceremony programs

- 7) Determine who will present the awards at the ceremony
- 8) Write script for award ceremony
- 9) Keep a list of who will be attending and make up nametags

Step 11: Set up for the Award Ceremony- day of

- 1) Prior to ceremony – a few hours in advance, have staff/volunteers set up tables for registration, food, sponsors; awards and podium/sound system. Set up tables for attendees based on expected attendance with a center aisle to make it easy to receive awards and plenty of room between tables.
- 2) Hang sponsor banners ; setup podium and PA system; registration table
- 3) 45 minutes prior to award ceremony, put food and beverages on food tables.
- 4) Set up and staff check in/registration table (have blank nametags and sharpies for guests that have not RSVP'D.)
- 5) Give awards and have someone on hand to take photos of winners receiving their award(s).
- 6) Breakdown Tasks- have volunteers available to help with breakdown.

Step 12: Complete event wrap up tasks

- 1) Send out press release of winners to media
- 2) Deliver any remaining sponsor certificates or awards if winners were not at the ceremony
- 3) Review notes with partners and update tasks for next year