

Rock Gardening

Perfect for our Climate

Summer in Spokane is dry and hot July through September. Plants from the intermountain West are well adapted to our climate, and require less water and less care.

Rock Garden Construction

Give it slope, even a little berm helps. Use rocky, gravelly, or sandy soil, though even clay works fine for most plants with a top dressing of grit.

An amendment with sandy loam will be perfect for most gardens--not needed in already sandy areas. Amend the planting hole with sand or gravel for plants needing particularly dry conditions (such as cacti). Locate in full sun.

Rocks are important in the rock garden. Use ones that look native or ones that you find decorative. Bigger as well as smaller rocks are helpful. Always use a fine gravel mulch. Bark or compost will rot rock garden plants. Cover 40-60% of the surface area with rock. The plants will still look predominant.

Irrigation is helpful, since the first year or two more irrigation is needed. The rockery is the most xeric garden, and needs water less often than the perennial border. All new plants need regular water.

The Most Color

Our most colorful gardens are the rock gardens. They bloom over a very long season, and are among the fastest to mature. A rock garden will look amazingly well grown even in one full season. The second year it is ready for a tour or a garden party (it takes 5 years in the shade garden). Many plants are evergreen.

The Easiest Care

Less water is only part of it. The gravel mulch does not need replacing. The plants are less bulky than huge ornamental grasses and such, so there is much less trimming and cutting back. Very little time is spent compared to other gardens. The plants are quite hardy, and few suffer in a bad winter.

Getting Started

Feel free to copy the Tower rock garden (the only public rockery in our area). We offer design service, and we know landscapers experienced in making rock gardens, too. If you plant the varieties recommended by Denver Botanic Gardens you will do well for a starter collection. A suggested group of plants for beginning rock gardeners is on the reverse. Rock gardens should be the most frequently used garden style in our area because it fits the climate and gives maximum beauty for full sun locations. Try a new bed--you'll see!

Read More

Lauren Springer's books (available at Tower) are the most informative.



Rock Garden Plants

There are *thousands* of possible rock garden plants. We use a few larger plants as well as some traditional mats, cushions, and domes (dwarf plants). The plants below are consistent performers, and will give you a fabulous garden. Remember to use some plants in multiples (3 to 25 depending on size of garden) so there will be some continuity in the garden. These are incredible plants that mature quickly to your delight.

- Abronia fragrans* White fragrant ball flowers. Low, spreading habit. All summer.
- Agastache 'Coronado'* Orange flowers. Hummingbirds yes, deer no. 24" *
- Agastache rupestris* Salmon flowers July-Oct. Hummingbirds. 24" Deer resistant.*
- Agastache 'Sonoran Sunset'* Like others, but rich pink tone.*
- Aquilegia 'Denver Gold'* Big, blooms all summer. 30" yellow show.*
- Bolax gummifera* Low mat feels like plastic. Yellow flowers early summer.
- Delosperma 'Mesa Verde'* Salmon/copper flowers all summer. Low mat. *
- Delosperma 'Table Mountain'* Hot pink flowers all summer. Low mat.*
- Dianthus simulans* Tight dome of tiny foliage. Tiny pink flowers. Neat looking.
- Diascia 'Coral Canyon'* Coral flowers all summer. Hardy form. 18" wide. *
- Draba* There are many excellent species. Yellow flowers early. Tight, low habit.
- Ephedra equisetina*. Structural/Architectural. Powder blue, 5' x 5'.
- Eriogonum* All species and varieties fit well. Very xeric. Mostly yellow flowers.
- Gaillardia 'Fanfare'* Amazingly prolific bloomer all summer and fall. Compact habit.
- Geranium magniflorum 'La Vita Lace'* Lacy foliage on neat small plant. *
- Juniperus 'Mother Lode'* Bright yellow, low soft foliage. Beautiful winter and summer.
- Opuntia* Any prickly pear cactus will be at home in the rockery. They are easy.
- Origanum 'Kent Beauty'* Ornamental oreganos bloom all summer, fine low cushion.
- Osteospermum 'Lavender Mist'* All summer, low habit, daisies held above foliage.*
- Osteospermum 'Purple Mountain'* Purple flowers. Both *Osteospermums* are hardy. *
- Papaver* Many great poppies, like *P. triniifolium*, soft orange all summer.
- Penstemon mensarum* Deep, cobalt blue flowers. Intense color. 18"
- Penstemon pinifolius* Scarlet red flowers on a small evergreen plant. 12" Long bloom.
- Penstemon 'Red Rocks'* Pink flowers. Penstemons attract humminbirds. Long bloom.*
- Picea pungens* Dwarf or prostrate varieties are xeric and add winter interest.
- Pinus mugo 'Valley Cushion'* A dwarf conifer that adds interest in winter.
- Salvia 'Caradonna'* Like other salvias, very long bloom and great color. 24"
- Sedum* All work well. We adore 'Angelina' and 'Lynda Windsor'.
- Sempervivum* All the hens and chicks work well here.
- Silene acaulis* Tight bright green mat of tiny foliage. A must in rockery.
- Veronica liwanensis* Like a creeping thyme, but very tight mat with bright blue bloom.*
- Yucca* All species and varieties fit well here. Can't go wrong.
- Zauchneria garrettii 'Orange Carpet'* Scarlet orange July-Oct. Super low mat. Vibrant.*

* = Recommended by Denver Botanic Gardens