

How Does Hailey's New Water Park Fit with Our High Desert Environment?

The City of Hailey has made a major step into low-water public spaces with the addition of Jimmy's Garden to our town's parks system. Although Jimmy's Garden is largely a public 'water park', it is a surprising model for various low water practices that will help it stand up to the limited water environment of our high desert home.

The elements that make this well used water park qualify as 'low water' or xeriscaped are all design elements that homeowners and businesses could also incorporate into their own landscape design to reduce their own need and costs for outdoor watering.

Consider some of the following Xeric Design elements found at Jimmy's Garden for your own outdoor spaces:

- Less than half of the park's square footage is covered in grass. Grass is the biggest water guzzler we can put in our landscape and should be used thoughtfully and sparingly. Turf grass uses a tremendous amount of water because of its shallow roots and additional water must be applied by being sprayed into dry and moving air that causes a great deal of water loss due to evaporation before reaching the soil where it is needed.
- The grass used in Jimmy's Garden is a low maintenance, low water fescue that does well with significantly less water and less mowing. The low water aspect of fescue grass is the result of the tremendous depth of its mature root system – six feet (yes, feet!) deep at maturity – which allows the grass to continue getting its needed water between fewer and deeper waterings. It is expected that, even with high use, this fescue grass will do well with as little as 1 or 2 waterings a week.
- The shade produced by the trees and bushes surrounding the park help to cool the area and the ground where low growing plants are living. This creates a cooler environment for enjoyment as well as an environment that will help reduce water needs for all the plantings.
- Plants chosen for Jimmy's Garden were chosen with drought tolerance in mind. Each one of the perennial flowers, bushes and trees found here will survive well with less water throughout the hottest days of summer.
- Flowers, shrubs and trees are all being watered with a drip irrigation system that drips water directly into the soil from hoses coiled around the plantings and under a layer of mulch. Very little water is lost to evaporation and the plants get all their water at the roots where they need it rather than on their delicate leaves and flowers.
- The fountain that has entertained hundreds of kids and adults this summer has two water saving features. The water that is pumped into the various interactive fountains seeps back through the fountain's cobblestone floor to be recirculated back into the fountains. It also has a built-in off feature so that water is flowing only when there are people playing in the water instead of continually.
- All of the elements listed above are design aspects every land and business owner could put to use in their outdoor space but the last step in a xeriscaped garden or yard may be the hardest to achieve. Once the grass, bushes and trees have adapted to their new location and have established healthy roots (this is generally during

the second and third summer after planting), it is necessary for the home or business owner to take a chance and actually reduce the water being put into the soil. This step is sometimes called 'droughting' the plants and means that the plants only become drought tolerant when they actually have less water. Weaning them of constant water will cause the plants to grow deeper roots that will then help it flourish with less water. The person in charge of the water given to the plants must pay close attention to the plants during these initial droughting years and hold off watering until the plants actually show they need more. It can be expected that in future years the drip system will only have to run 1 or 2 times a week during the hottest weeks of summer and much less in the months preceding and following these peaks. We will be publishing the decrease in Jimmy's Garden's future water bills as this most difficult step is undertaken in the years to come. In August 2007, the park used 98,000 gallons of water.