

Santa Fe homeowners weigh in on landscape preferences

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A typical landscape in a Santa Fe front yard features high desert plants. Credit: Photo by Rolston St. Hilaire.

While municipalities may mandate communitywide water conservation measures, individuals—particularly homeowners—can make significant contributions to water conservation in urban environments. Hoping to provide urban planners with more information about how residents' landscape preferences affect municipal water supplies, a team from New Mexico State University surveyed homeowners in Santa Fe about their attitudes toward high desert plants. Rolston St. Hilaire, Dawn M. VanLeeuwen, and Patrick Torres reported on their study of residents' preferences for urban landscapes and water conservation strategies in a recent issue of *HortTechnology*.

The survey contained questions about homeowners' perceptions of desert

plants, trees, and grass lawns in home landscapes; willingness to change current home landscapes; opinions on current water use practices; and factors that could affect their willingness to reduce water use. "Santa Fe, a city that boasts a long history of water conservation efforts, also has one of the highest [water usage](#) rates in the United States for a city of its size", noted the researchers.

According to the survey, almost one-third of the respondents agreed that high desert plants are not their favorite varieties. "However, most Santa Fe residents are satisfied with these plants, indicating that they provide the type of [landscape](#) they desire", observed the researchers. They added that 64% of residents agreed that high desert plants provided the variety they needed in their residential landscapes, and 92% of residents would use high desert plants to landscape their front yard. Homeowners had a strong preference for retaining their current desert landscapes and converting traditional landscapes to high desert-adapted landscapes.

When homeowners who irrigated their landscapes were asked what factors would cause them to use less water, the most selected option—chosen by 94% of respondents—was "water shortages". Interestingly, the study found that the longer people have been residents of a desert environment, the less likely they are to adopt a water-conserving landscape.

The research team sees implications for city officials when it comes to selecting effective water conservation strategies. "This research clearly indicates that the fear of water shortage is one of the most important factors that will get communities to reduce landscape water use in the high desert regions of New Mexico. Therefore, municipalities must craft public education water conservation programs that show or even simulate water shortages as a possible consequence of apathy to water conservation in the [urban environment](#)", the study concluded.

More information: The complete study and abstract are available on the ASHS HortTechnology electronic journal web site:
[horttech.ashspublications.org/ ... nt/abstract/20/2/308](http://horttech.ashspublications.org/...nt/abstract/20/2/308)

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