

YOUR SUSTAINABLE HOME LANDSCAPE

Sustainable landscape design is a comprehensive approach that not only improves the environment but will reduce maintenance and conserve energy. The most obvious benefit is a reduction of water consumption through use of water conservation by using drought tolerant plants and grass. Many homeowners will see a 50% reduction in water consumption and 50% less landscape maintenance.

Sustainable landscapes have fewer leaves to clean up, reduced lawn mowing (less area of highly maintained lawns), use less fertilizer, chemicals and water. Wherever possible, low-water use native plants, shrub beds, tree groves and native groundcovers or grasses should be used in place of high maintenance turf.

Sustainable landscapes are designed to thrive on limited or no supplemental irrigation after establishment. (When traditional yards are turning brown and dying during periods of drought, your established sustainable landscape will continue to thrive.)

Perhaps the most common myth that people have about sustainable landscaping is that it means turning your landscape into a rock garden sprinkled with cacti. Nothing could be further from the truth. Plant selection and layout is only one component of a successful low water use landscape. Sometimes called xeriscape, a successful sustainable landscape consists of plants (trees, shrubs, groundcovers, perennials) that are regionally and seasonally appropriate (natives and adaptives - no invasives). There is a large plant palette to use for your sustainable garden; it can be just as bright and colorful as any other professionally designed landscape!

There is no single cookie cutter design to guarantee a successful sustainable landscape. Developing an appropriate design will mean the difference between success and failure. Always try to work with the natural features of your landscape. Here are some of the issues you need to consider:

- Which areas of your landscape have shade throughout the day or part of the day?
- How do your shade patterns change with the seasons?
- Which areas of your landscape are open slopes that do not collect water, what areas are flat and collect some rainwater and which areas of your landscape have natural water collection (low areas or areas with natural borders that facilitate water collection)?

Mulching is the use of organic and inorganic materials to create a conditioning layer on top of your soil. Common inorganic mulch materials are rock and gravel chips with fabric soil separator weed barriers (specifically made to perform with semi-permeable fabric to provide the equivalent benefits of a natural mulch). Common organic mulch materials are bark mulch, bark chips, compost, pinestraw and leaf litter. There are two main benefits in creating a mulch barrier.

- The main benefit is to control water evaporation. A layer of mulch material will keep the ground moist. The more water you retain in the soil, the bigger the benefit to your plant's root structure. Roots will also grow deeper and stronger when provided with sufficient water and moisture.
- The second major benefit of mulching is to create a natural weed barrier. The lack of sunlight penetrating the mulch layer is usually all you need to prevent unwanted growth of weeds.

Grass areas should be designed using at least three types of grass treatments:

- Class A grass is a walkable, playable manicured turf used near the home. Class A grass is mown weekly during growing season and may be bordered by landscape beds. Use of warm season turf (Bermuda, zoysia, centipede) will require less irrigation after establishment than cool season turf (fescue and bluegrass blends).
- Class B grass is cut after the grass goes to seed about 2 – 3 times seasonally. This grass is used within drainage swales and may extend to the property boundary, and will be meadow-like and include tree groves placed in the grass.
- Class C grass is cut once a season (usually with a small tractor) and is used to provide wildlife habitat and preservation of natural areas along property line buffers.

Proper irrigation is crucial to allow your garden to establish itself. A well designed irrigation system uses water conserving products.

- Drip irrigation is the most efficient way of watering shrubs and beds.
- Automatic rain sensors reduce waste of irrigation water during rainy periods.

Rainwater harvesting can be designed to use reclaimed water for irrigation both shrub bed areas and Class A lawn areas.

Consult with licensed landscape architects, such as Sears Design Group, to assist you in the design and specifications for your sustainable home landscape.

