



GO Green:

Make Your Yard More Environmentally Friendly

BY JANET THOMSON

When tackling how to make your landscape environmentally friendly, you should think of two things – conserving resources and using non-toxic products. Since water is one of your main resources for maintaining a beautiful lawn, you should plan to use vegetation that is native to your region, uses minimal water and requires nominal care.

Incorporate Native Plants in Your Landscaping

Using plants native to your area when landscaping helps reduce the likelihood of introducing new invasive species. Because native plants have adapted to the area's climate and soil, they often require less water, fertilizer and pesticide. When fewer chemicals are used to maintain your lawn, it helps water quality in nearby rivers and streams. You can also save water by including drought-resistant perennials in your planning. In addition,

native plants attributes to the increase presence of desirable wildlife, such as butterflies and birds, giving them a safe haven as they journey between summer and winter habitats. The Virginia Native Plant Society and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation have compiled a list identifying plants native to this region.

Plant Trees Strategically

When designing your landscape, you want to plant trees strategically so that they provide enough shade for your home. This will help cut down on your need for air-conditioning during those summer months, saving both energy and money. Furthermore, you should avoid planting trees on the south side of your home – during the winter months, you'll get more sunlight and a lower heating bill. According to cleanairgardening.com, trees are like the lungs of the planet. They breathe

in carbon dioxide and breathe out oxygen, which provides a habitat for birds and other wildlife. ColoradoTree.org stated that 800 million tons of carbon is stored in the trees that make up the urban forests of the United States, translating a savings of \$22 billion in control costs. In addition, mature trees can absorb roughly 48 pounds of carbon dioxide a year, which releases enough oxygen to sustain two human beings. Basically, when you plant a tree you save a life.

Make Your Own Compost or Use Organic Fertilizer

For the enthusiastic homeowner taking on the task of planting a garden, you might want to consider making your own fertilizer. You can make your own compost by using fruit and vegetable peellings, egg shells, and coffee grounds. The consensus among agricultural scientists all over the world



is that compost is an excellent source of organic matter for garden plants. It sustains a healthy atmosphere for the soil and keeps insects, plant diseases, and weeds away.

If the idea of making your own compost isn't appealing, you do have another option – organic fertilizer. Organic fertilizers are carbon-based compounds that increase the productivity and growth quality of plants, according to organicfacts.net. Since it's bio-degradable, it's safer for the environment, it ensures the fertility of the soil and increases its nutrient-holding capacity. Conversely, the use of chemical fertilizers can contaminate both land and water, which attributes to diseases, and is associated with the extinction of a number of plant, animal and insect species.

Use an Environmentally Friendly Watering System

If you're planning to grow edible plants, you should be watering your lawn with a lead-free hose. The best hose for watering your lawn is one that is safe for drinking and made of natural rubber or polyurethane, according to zingerhardware.com. They recommend using the Gatorhyde Lead-Free Garden Hose, which is 100 percent lead free, and contains no harmful contaminants or BPA. On the other hand, you might want to convert to a drip irrigation system, which delivers water directly to your plants with minimal waste. According to Colorado State University, drip irrigation systems are around 90 percent efficient, while traditional sprinkle systems are only 50 – 70 percent efficient.

When planning your lawn project, keep in mind that your landscaping ideas can have a big impact on how efficient and sustainable your home is in the long run. For example, how you strategically plant trees can help cool off a building or reduce the amount of energy allocated to air conditioning your home. And, since water is your most valuable resource, conserving it should take priority. The decision you make today will determine your environmental footprint tomorrow. ■

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