



Quick and Dirty: Sustainable Landscaping Made Simple

These sustainable ideas are cheap and easy, whether you have acres of land or a few patio plants.



2011, Dorling Kindersley Limited

Rain barrels are used to collect rainwater from the roof. These supplies of water are a valuable alternative to city water or well water.

By: [Danny Bonvissuto](#)

Who has the worst reputation in the world of green living? Sustainable landscaping. This misunderstood outcast eats its lunch alone in the far corner of the cafeteria while the popular parts—eating organically and recycling—rule the cool kids’ table. Why? Because we assume it requires too much of two things—money and effort—when it’s actually just the opposite.

“My mother always told me the best way to keep a house clean is not to mess it up in the first place,” says Lee Garrard RLA/ASLA, co-owner of MedicineWheel Land Planning in Athens, Georgia and Charleston, South Carolina. “If you don’t mess up the land, there’s nothing to repair. Nature provides us with everything we need to work with the land instead of against it.”

Whether you have acres of land or a few patio plants, implementing these ideas is cheap, easy and sure to help sustainable landscaping rise up the ranks of popularity:

Develop a Crush on Rubble

That pile of discarded aggregate isn't junk, it's your new hardscape. Recycled local materials like brick, stone, lumber and even metal can enjoy a new life as walkways, walls, decks and patios. "I found some broken concrete, arranged it in a pattern in a 20-by-20 space, filled it with dirt and planted grass between the joints," Garrard says. "The grass took off and made it look beautiful and substantial."

Think Inside the Box

Garrard and co-owner/landscape designer Lauren Stubbs set up nesting boxes for birds and bats on Rushland Plantation—a 500-acre neighborhood in Johns Island, South Carolina—to support local wildlife and offset the need for fungicides and pesticides. "A bat can eat over 1,000 insects a night," Garrard says. "Providing dependable water sources like bird baths and forms of shelter encourages wildlife to work with you." Something as small as incorporating a small stone pile makes a big difference: it provides cover for insects, amphibians, chipmunks and other creatures.

Rein in the Rain

Make the best of a rainy afternoon by watching where the water goes. Where does it drain? Where does it pool? "This is a great opportunity to use what is naturally happening to focus plants that love water in specific areas," Garrard says. "You'll water less and offset erosion issues." He also suggests rain barrels and rain chains to harvest rainwater, which is better for your landscape than what comes out of the hose.

Get to Know the Natives

Plants indigenous to the area don't require as many fertilizers or pesticides, need less water and play nice with the local animals and insects.

Matter Matters

Composting gets a bad rap for requiring too much effort, but how much time (and money!) does it take to buy mulch, then return to the garden shop to get the extra bags you should've bought the first time? Compost returns organic matter to the soil and keeps it out of landfills. In the fall, let the leaves fall where they may...and leave them there to feed the soil instead of raking and blowing.



Sustainable Landscape Design

Sustainable landscaping pairs plants that benefit each other – and you.

By: [Kristi York Wooten](#)



Julie Orr Design

Sustainable landscape design for residential properties includes environmentally-friendly materials, plants that benefit the local ecology and a design with a renewable lifestyle in mind.

It may be difficult to create an entirely sustainable landscape design plan unless you're starting from scratch. However, small changes to your own yard or garden can make a big impact.

Start by replacing materials that could be harmful to plant life, animals and your family. Old railroad ties containing the chemical creosote should be removed and replaced with non-pressure-treated landscape timbers. Untreated wood is not termite resistant but is generally fine to use in landscaping that does not border the house structure.

Natural rocks and stones are perfect additions to sustainable landscaping because they can be used to protect beds, create low maintenance pathways and enhance the water flow through your property.

Solar lights are a great addition to a sustainable landscape plan. Not only are they long-lasting, but they also bring peace of mind to a design that requires plentiful outdoor lighting – without the energy consumption or costs of electrically wired lights.

Choosing plants for sustainable landscaping is easy: go local and organic. Which plants are indigenous to your region and climate? Make a list of flowers, shrubs and grasses that thrive in your area and design your landscape plan to include varieties that, when planted as companions, attract a balanced variety of bugs and bacteria and thrive in local soil types.

Did you know that native gardens require up to 77% less water than non-native plants, especially in hot or dry climates. Keep exotic or non-native plants inside your home, where you can care for them without the additional water usage required to cover an entire yard.

Vegetables and fruits that are native to your region can be the centerpieces of your sustainable landscape plan. They'll grow well, seasonally, with minimal care and can yield produce for you to consume and share with neighbors. That, of course will cut down on your carbon footprint. You'll no longer be driving a car to the grocery store to buy tomatoes and when you can walk into your sustainable garden and pick them straight off the vine!

Don't forget to think about how your property affects your lifestyle choices. Would adding a natural patio or sitting area in the garden get you outdoors more often? Gardening as a hobby can provide health benefits beyond the sustainability of your landscape: it can provide activity and pleasure for a lifetime.

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