

## Sustainable Benefits

Spring is here, and maybe it's time to rethink your overall landscaping goals. With more unpredictable weather patterns and the costs associated with maintaining a typical yard, including [sustainable practices](#) in your landscape plan can bring many benefits. The term 'sustainable' is used to describe a practice or system that can continue over a long period of time. A sustainable landscape is defined as a landscape that supports environmental quality and conservation of natural resources. Sometimes a sustainable landscape is associated with a bare, desert-like appearance or one that looks wild and unmanaged. Neither of these extremes have to be true. Creating a sustainable landscape can keep your yard within your neighborhood association's requirements while still offering many benefits. The key to achieving this balance is to keep your yard neat, and make sure your plant choices look tidy and intentional, not overgrown and random.



*Increasing areas with plants, trees, shrubs, and grasses, while decreasing turfgrass and paved areas, can work together to improve sustainability on your property.*

There are many strategies that can be incorporated into your existing yard to make it more sustainable: Choose drought-tolerant landscape plants that will stay within the planned area rather than sprawling beyond. The unkempt appearance of some plants can be controlled with regular maintenance and by installing features like arbors to direct growth and fences to provide boundaries. Natural areas can be made more attractive by regularly removing debris and unwanted plants to maintain a neat, managed look. Materials such as pervious paving or pea gravel can reduce the stormwater impact of large, paved areas such as driveways. The advantages of creating a more sustainable landscape include better managing

stormwater on your property and reducing some of the care and maintenance that more traditional landscapes require.



*A rain garden can help manage stormwater in your landscape.*

Reducing the [amount of turf](#) in your yard is the biggest step you can take toward creating a sustainable landscape. A traditionally landscaped yard generally includes turf, and lots of it. Americans manage approximately 40 million acres of lawn, and apply more than 100 million tons of fertilizer and 80 million pounds of pesticides annually. A yard with 10,000 square feet of turf requires an average of 10,000 gallons of water each summer to keep it green. Opting for a more sustainable landscape can help decrease the time, cost, and natural resources needed to maintain your yard.



*Reducing turfgrass in your landscape can help make it more resilient and sustainable.*

This can be done in phases, as time and budget allow. Creating natural areas and installing [plants](#) that will attract birds, desirable bugs, [pollinators](#), and other wildlife to your yard will further support your landscape's sustainability.



*Plants native to Alabama can add a beautiful element to your landscape design.*

While this process will require that you cultivate a little tolerance for imperfection, you eventually can establish a system of [integrated pest management](#) in your yard which will require less of your intervention. The long term savings realized by using fewer yard chemicals and less fuel for mowing can more than make up for the initial cost of installing the new landscape elements.

[Redefining](#) your overall landscape goals and gradually shifting toward sustainability will continue to provide rewards in terms of environmental quality, landscape sustainability, improved aesthetics, better stormwater management, and overall vitality for your property. These short [videos](#) from the Alabama Cooperative Extension address specific landscape topics that may be helpful.

