



Latest Trends in Eco Landscaping



Green landscaping methodology is worlds apart from traditional landscaping techniques, and emphasizes the conscious selection of appropriate plants, water efficiency/conservation, and the use of fewer resources to blend the landscape into the natural world and enrich the biodiversity of the surrounding ecosystem.

Following are some green landscaping methods that are not classified as complicated or high tech, and are relatively easy for the average person to adopt.

Soil Quality

Green landscaping is all about quality . . . of the soil that is. Since healthy soil equals healthy plants, green landscapers are constantly on the lookout for ways to boost soil fertility. When you hire a company focused on sustainable results for the long term, they will provide you with new plants and healthy soil rich in organic matter. This reduces maintenance and watering requirements and increases the life of your plants.

Green landscaping offers both facility managers and homeowners a chance to save money, time, and resources while establishing healthier plants and soil, and adding to the diverse ecosystems of the planet. The future of sustainable landscaping lies in our capacity to accurately mimic the processes of nature for maximum efficiency—not with short-term, quick-fix, chemical solutions that push our plants and poison our earth.

Eco-Friendly Landscape Essentials

Organic matter is the most basic element that determines soil fertility, and compost is the best organic matter source that you can offer a landscape, so compost is an essential part of any green landscaping project—its job is to nourish your plants by infusing the soil with life and fertility. "Feed the soil, not the plants" is a common adage among landscapers and gardeners, and if this goal is met, plants will not require supplemental nutrients in the form of fertilizer. If the native soil on a project soil does not have adequate organic matter, compost will need to be added.

Most of these little bugs eat organic matter in the soil and turn it into nutrients that plants need in order to thrive.

It provides a complete nutrient base that facilitates the symbiotic relationship between the microorganisms and the plant. Plants produce sugar (carbohydrates) through photosynthesis and send this energy down to the roots. Roots collect nutrients like nitrogen, calcium, and magnesium, and will often make a trade exchange with microorganisms—sugars for nutrients.

Bagged compost can be purchased at any hardware store or nursery, but the best quality compost is often found at your local compost facility (sometimes located near your local dump). This facility compost material is usually for large projects only—the minimum purchase is generally a truckload that will run an average of \$20 per truckload and \$100 per dumptruck load.

The green landscaping industry takes its cues from various horticultural viewpoints such as permaculture and organics. These methods emphasize emulating nature by creating a complex web of soil life to sustain plants, rather than constantly applying harsh petrochemical fertilizers to push growth. Compost is a great

alternative to these harsh treatments because it contributes to the desired soil complexity and one application can sustain plants for at least a year, while the effects of harsh chemical fertilizers last a month at most.

There are many debates surrounding how to incorporate compost into the soil, most of them centered on rototilling, a process that creates some damaging effects by contributing to soil compaction and erosion. Unfortunately, rototilling happens to be the only economical way to thoroughly mix compost into soil. Most green landscaping companies aim to avert considerable soil damage by rototilling a substantial amount of compost into a site's soil before planting, and thus, very little fertilizer is needed.

The process of adding any beneficial material to the soil is called *amending* the soil. Once the soil is properly amended with organic matter, let the planting begin! Sustainable landscaping companies generally place very small plants in 4-inch pots. These small plants will grow faster than larger plants, and they usually prove to be masters at adapting to wherever they are planted by quickly spreading root systems deep into the soil. Smaller plants also require less energy for growth, further reducing the carbon footprint of a green landscape.

Irrigation Techniques and Moisture Retention

The next step in green landscaping is to consider your irrigation options. Drip irrigation, also called trickle irrigation, directs a slow release of water to the soil surface or directly onto root systems. Spray irrigation, the most common alternative, wastes a substantial amount of water by evaporation and is not suitable for most perennials, as the plants grow up and block the sprayers. Which is the better green landscaping choice?

Installation and Conservation. Drip irrigation far outperforms the alternative—installation is fast and inexpensive, and

the system waters deeply while using considerably less water than spray irrigation.

Water Wise. Sustainable landscaping techniques pair choices like a drip irrigation system with drought-tolerant plants, so that deep watering twice a month is often sufficient.

Plant Health. Drip irrigation assists with the development of deep root systems that encourage a stronger, healthier, and more drought-resistant landscape.

Savings. Your natural landscape will naturally lead to a substantially lower water bill.

Another important addition to a green landscape, especially important with drip irrigation, is mulch. Mulch is simply a blanket of organic matter placed on the soil to insulate it and hold in moisture, and can include anything from woodchips to leaves to coffee grounds. Mulch is inexpensive and it may be the best investment you make in your green landscaping project because it keeps weeds at bay much longer than compost alone. The ideal mulch is a mixture of 50% compost and 50% woody material, often available at your local dump. The woody material in this mix readily decomposes, unlike wood chips.

Some of the most popular mulch products used by organic gardeners are those processed at the local waste disposal site. These mulches, made from what goes in your green waste bin, are recycled and are then often certified as organic if the mixture meets certain standards. If you don't want to buy mulch, most coffee houses will give you their organic coffee grounds for free. These provide a rich source of nutrients and can be applied directly onto the soil as mulch. Other mulch materials include straw, sawdust, and lawn and yard clippings. Here are a few tips to help you get mulching in your yard underway:

Do a little research and choose appropriate mulch material for

the plants that you have.

Never mound-up mulch against plants.

Introduce things gradually—test it out and see what works.

Start with 2 inches of compost and evaluate the progress.

Recycled Goods

Another key to a highly successful green landscaping project is the use of recycled materials such as mulch, other soil amendments, and landscape construction materials. With high lumber costs and forest land in short supply, recycled materials provide both environmentally friendly and economically favorable options for sustainable landscaping. For instance, recycled plastic bender board never rots, it's less costly than redwood, and it's faster to install for decks and landscape edging. The same goes for recycled mulches—they're inexpensive, easy to come by, and applying them will not require much of your time.

Recycled materials can be incorporated into the hardscape as well. The term *hardscape* refers to the stonework portion of a landscaping project, typically including flagstone paths and patios, and stone retaining walls. Broken-up concrete, which is widely available from construction sites and always free, can make an attractive substitute for flagstone, and many people also build retaining walls from this material. Recycled brick is another great option for creating beautiful paths and patios.

Using recycled materials in the hardscape ensures that the consumer is not inadvertently supporting environmental degradation by buying stone and rock trucked from far away places. Instead of using expensive lumber that risks damage to the environment, use one of the many recycled plastic products that can be substituted for decks and landscape edging. These recycled materials also last longer because they are not susceptible to rot, like wood, making them a highly attractive option for the hardscape.

Green landscaping offers the homeowner a chance to save money, time, and resources while establishing healthier plants and soil, and adding to the diverse ecosystems of the planet. The future of sustainable landscaping lies in our capacity to accurately mimic the processes of nature for maximum efficiency—not with short-term, quick-fix, chemical solutions that push our plants and poison our earth. Look for organic fertilizer for your plants and follow our tips for the cleanest and greenest landscape solutions.

