



THE LANDSCAPE CENTER

Beautiful Landscape Source of Pride, But It Shouldn't Take All Your Time

A beautiful, well-maintained landscape is the pride of most homeowners. Sometimes, however, we create landscapes that demand too much time and attention when combined with everything else in our busy lives.

Although there always will be a certain amount of time that you will regularly need to devote to landscape maintenance, it should not become an undue burden. If you need to reduce the amount of time spent doing yard work, here are some ideas to help cut down on the amount of maintenance your landscape demands.

Reduce The Work

Flower beds generally are the highest maintenance part of a landscape. If you are trying to decrease the amount of maintenance your landscape requires, it is a good idea to minimize the number and size of flower beds (or even eliminate them).

In this effort, plant flowers only in the most important places, such as flanking the front entrance of your home or around the patio. Reduce maintenance even more by planting colorful bedding plants in large containers instead of in the ground.

Lawns are another high-maintenance part of the landscape, since a lawn generally must be mowed at least once a week from April until November. Lawns are attractive in the landscape and are necessary for outdoor activities, but do you really need that much lawn? A smaller lawn means less work.

Reduce maintenance by replacing areas where the lawn is not necessary with lower maintenance ground covers. You also can reduce lawn areas by enlarging your deck or patio area and creating or enlarging beds of low-maintenance shrubs and perennials.

Since fertilizer stimulates growth, which increases mowing frequency, fertilize your lawn moderately, if at all. Fertilization is only critical if your lawn shows signs of low vigor or you need to stimulate growth to fill in damaged areas.

When you do mow, use a mulching lawn mower and save yourself the trouble of having to stop and empty a bag periodically.

Make The Right Choices

Pruning adds a lot of work to landscape maintenance, and the most common reason for pruning is to control the size of plants that grow too big for their locations. If you choose plants that will mature at the desired size, you will reduce your work substantially. Always find out how large a tree or shrub will grow before you plant it in your landscape.

Choose trees and shrubs that are well-adapted to our climate and are not prone to constant pest problems. Ask at the nursery what problems a plant is prone to suffer from before you purchase it. By selecting plants that are not as likely to have major insect or disease problems, you will reduce the considerable amount of work involved in pest control.

In addition, make sure you select plants that will thrive in the location where they are to be planted. Evaluate the light conditions of the area before you select the plants, since the amount of light the area receives will largely determine what you can plant there. If you put a plant in a location where it is not happy, it will be nothing but a problem for you to deal with.

To avoid mistakes in choosing plants, try to make at least some effort to learn about the plants you want to use before you purchase and plant them. Ask questions. Doing this can save you lots of work later on.

Do What's Important

One of the most labor-intensive parts of gardening is bed preparation – getting a bed ready to be planted with shrubs, bedding plants, ground covers or whatever. Do not scrimp on this. It is worth every bit of effort you put into it and is directly related to how well your plants will grow. Till the soil deeply, and always incorporate a generous 2-inch to 3-inch layer of compost, aged or processed manures, peat moss or other types of organic matter into the bed before you plant.

Mulching is very important for an attractive landscape and healthy plants, but is especially critical in reducing weeds. A 2-inch to 3-inch layer of mulch should be placed over the soil in every bed in your landscape. Mulches greatly reduce time spent weeding, so mulching is well worth the cost and effort. Not only are mulches your best defense against weeds, but they also conserve soil moisture. This reduces the amount of watering you need to do.

Speaking of watering, professionally installed irrigation systems with automatic timers are an excellent way to save time and effort in watering. Even soaker hoses hooked up to automatic timers are an easy-to-use, inexpensive way to water beds. Timers are available at most hardware and building supply stores.

-- Dan Gill, LSU AgCenter Horticulturist