



earth-wise guide to

Yard Care

Quick Tips

principles

Follow these common sense landscaping tips to conserve and protect our water. They can also save you time and money.

8 steps to a great landscape...

1. Start with a plan
2. Prepare your soil
3. Use the right plants
4. Plant trees for shade
5. Use mulch
6. Irrigate efficiently
7. Maintain healthy turf
8. Use least-toxic choices

why grow green?

The Grow Green program recommends the least toxic approach to pest management and responsible fertilizer use in order to reduce the amount of landscape chemicals that run-off into our waterways and degrade water quality.

1. Start with a Plan

- Take into account how you'd like to use your yard -- do you need an area for games and entertaining, a haven for wildlife and butterflies, or a place of quiet contemplation?
- Consider soil and sun conditions, drainage, water availability, views you'd like to protect or create, budget and time line
- When choosing plants, consider flower and foliage color, plant shape, seasonal variation and interest
- Use porous materials for walkways (and driveways, if appropriate) that allow water to soak in rather than run off the property

- Minimize turf areas when possible. Grass can require more chemicals and water to maintain than plant beds.

2. Prepare and analyze your soil

- Provide a minimum of 6" of quality soil for turf areas and landscape beds
- Use a mixture of high quality loam, compost or other organic matter and coarse grit sand in your soil (exception: some native plants do better with poor soils)
- Test your soil for nutrient needs every three years. Test kits are available at your local **Grow Green nursery** or by calling the **Cooperative Extension at (512)854-9600**



This green garden includes reduced lawn areas and native and adapted plant beds

3. Select the right plant for the location and plant it correctly

- Choose plants that are drought-tolerant and well-adapted to soil and sun conditions of the site (see Grow Green Landscape Plant Guide); they will also be more disease and pest-resistant
- Group together plants with similar water and sunlight needs
- Pay attention to full-grown size and then space accordingly
- Follow these planting techniques:
 - Dig planting holes the same depth as the root ball, but two to six times the width
 - Amend soil in the planting areas mixing in 2-3" of compost
 - Backfill planting hole with removed soil, watering well to settle soil around the root ball

4. Plant trees for shade

- Save energy by using trees and shrubs to shade the western and southwestern walls of your home and to shade paved areas
- Use deciduous trees or low growing shrubs on southern exposures to allow sun to heat your home in winter
- Avoid fast growing "trash trees" (see Landscape Plant guide)

5. Use mulch:

- Use a 2-3" layer of organic mulch to deter weed growth, reduce water evaporation and enrich the soil
- Use a thin layer of rock mulches around some heat-loving or desert-adapted plants. Some plants seldom need supplemental watering

6. Irrigate efficiently:

- Design your landscape so that the highest water use plants are near the house and easy to irrigate. Use drought-tolerant plants for those areas less accessible to water
- Soak garden soil to a depth of at least 4-6" per watering
- Watering every 5-10 days or less in the summer is usually adequate for established plants
- Choose sprinklers that throw large drops of water (not a mist) close to the ground
- Avoid sprinklers that throw water high into the air to avoid evaporation and wind drift
- Use soaker hoses or drip irrigation for planting beds to water slowly near the plant roots
- For underground sprinkler systems:
 - Choose a system with low volume, low-angle spray heads
 - Do not rely on an automatic schedule. Adjust settings frequently based on need
- Check irrigation equipment frequently and perform the necessary repairs

7. Maintain healthy turf:

- Start with the best grass for your location (see Lawn Care Fact Sheet)
- Don't bag grass clippings - they are a natural fertilizer and return 60% of the needed nitrogen and 100% of the phosphorous and potassium to your soil
- Reduce fertilizer application rates up to 75% - standard recommendations on the bag don't take into account the benefits of not bagging grass clippings

- Choose fertilizers carefully
 - organic and natural fertilizers outperformed synthetic ones in recent tests at Texas A&M, both for looks and water quality benefits.
- Do not use weed and feed products - the best time to treat weeds is not the best time to fertilize.

Did you know-

The Environmental Protection Agency has banned two popular chemicals-- Dursban and Diazinon

Dispose of chemicals properly -call your Household Hazardous Waste Collection Facility

8. Use least-toxic choices

- Plant a diverse garden to attract beneficial insects and ensure that a single pest problem won't destroy your entire landscape
- Use pesticides as a last resort - most kill not only the harmful bugs but also the beneficial ones
- Refer to the Grow Green Fact Sheets to properly identify pest and disease problems and to learn the least toxic solutions
- If you must use pesticides, follow label directions exactly to avoid overuse.
- Don't spray chemicals during windy conditions
- Remember to monitor for problems frequently - early detection offers more solutions
- Never use chemicals before a rain - they run off to harm our creeks rather than helping your yard