

BEST PRACTICES



Ready for a Fall Yard Makeover? Try Naturescaping!

Are you dreaming of a lush landscape that will save you money and be easy to care for? Fall is the perfect time to bring year-round beauty and bounty to your yard. With cooler weather headed our way, you will be working with nature to create your own backyard sanctuary. Start with small steps or go all out, it's up to you! Use these tips to create an amazing naturescape (natural landscape) that reduces water use, stormwater runoff and pollution without sacrificing splendor.

Naturescaping uses nature as a guide. It's a way to create a landscape that sustains itself, needing less maintenance and water and no chemical pesticides and fertilizers.

Lose the Lawn (and the Maintenance)

Reducing or removing lawn is the first step to creating your oasis. Lawns tend to dominate landscapes and can be high maintenance and costly. This is because it takes a lot of energy, time and soil supplements to keep a lawn healthy. A big problem is the amount of water needed to keep lawns green during the warm season. As a result, landscapes with a lot of lawn use more water than those with a mixture of plants and lawn. This can have a big impact on your water bill and on local waterways.

Here are a few ways to tackle this step without using toxic chemicals:

Hand Dig. This makes sense when removing small areas of lawn. Dig deep enough to remove grass roots and shake the topsoil (good stuff!) off the roots into the planting bed. Then dispose of remaining roots and grass.

Use a Sod Cutter. This is the quickest way to get rid of lawn by stripping the surface layer of grass. The sod cutter slices under the grass, cutting it into strips about 18" wide. This method leaves a clean, edged bed that's ready for planting. This method also removes organic matter and valuable topsoil. One solution is to compost the cut pieces of sod by flipping them over (dirt side up) and stacking it (lasagna-style) to build bermed beds.

Smother Grass. Use thick stacks of cardboard as a sheet mulch to block light. This causes the lawn underneath to slowly break down and die. It's the lowest cost method to get rid of grass, and it's easy to do! With sheet mulching, valuable nutrients, microorganisms and organic matter found in the topsoil and grass stays in place. As the grass decomposes, it improves soil health and fertility in your new planting bed.

For more information, visit streamteam.info/downsizingyourlawn.



Before Starting Your Project Please Check:

- Where are the utilities such as electric, gas, water, sewer or septic tank and drain field?
- Are there any easements across your property?
- Is there an existing irrigation system? Where?



Remove Unhealthy & Invasive Plants

Problem weeds can quickly overtake a yard and surrounding local habitat. Some are toxic to humans and pets. Problem weeds include knotweed, scotch broom, Himalayan black berry, English ivy and tansy ragwort.

For more information on identifying, removing, controlling and disposing of noxious weeds and invasive plants, visit Thurston County's website at www.co.thurston.wa.us/tcweeds.

Attract Bees, Birds & Butterflies

Creating wildlife habitat can be one of the most enjoyable payoffs of any naturescaping project. Remember to include all the basic needs of wildlife: water, food and shelter.

Water. Water is an increasingly rare resource for wildlife in urban environments. Something as simple as a shallow saucer refreshed every 3–5 days with clean water, will attract a variety of interesting birds to bathe and drink. Surround your birdbath with Oregon grape—cats tend to avoid the prickly leaves.

Food. Provide wildlife with natural sources of seeds, berries, and nectar. Plants that attract the insects that birds like to eat are also a good way to provide food. Good examples include: red-osier dogwood, elderberry, vine maple, hazelnut, oceanspray, huckleberry, baldhip, nootka, and woods' rose, mock orange, Oregon grape, salal, red-flowering currant, kinnikinnick and bunchberry!

Cover and Shelter. Birds and other creatures require protection from predators, the weather and need places to nest and raise their young. Create diverse and layered plantings of evergreen trees, dense plantings of native shrubs and groundcovers. It is also important to provide nesting materials such as soft, dried plant material. Birds gather nesting material from around your yard. When cleaning up flower beds this fall leave some soft, dried plant stalks and leaves for birds to use as nesting materials in the spring.

Visit streamteam.info/native-plants-reference-library for more information on native plants.

Use Less Water

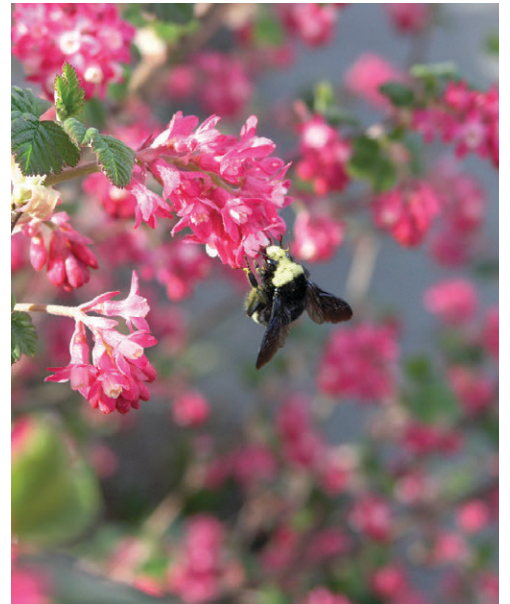
High water use in the summer is a problem because of how it affects watersheds and lowers the aquifers during the dry months. Both rivers and aquifers (groundwater) can dry up as a result of increased water use.

Use these tips to create a water efficient landscape:

Right plant, right place. Your yard is made up of numerous microclimates with specific growing conditions. These include sun exposure, humidity, soil type, moisture and wind direction. Plants need different amounts of water, sun, shade, soil types, and nutrients to survive. Choosing plants that are suited for the microclimates in your yard will help keep them healthy and save water.

Build soil health. Adding organic soil amendments, like compost, will improve soil structure and the water-holding capacity of sandy soils so you can water less frequently.

Mulch around plants. Organic mulch increases the soils ability to store water by covering and cooling the soil to minimize evaporation. It also reduces erosion and weed propagation, and some even provide nutrients and interesting landscape textures.



Create separate watering zones in your landscape. Within each watering zone, all plants should have the same general watering needs, allowing you to give each plant the water it needs.

Water wisely. Irrigate early in the morning when evaporation is minimal. Watering thoroughly, but infrequently, this will help roots go deeper, making plants more drought tolerant.

Make Your Naturescape Interesting & Inviting

Adding special features to your design that mimic nature can add interest, texture and function to your landscape.

Swales. Rocky, grassy, or vegetated channels that are constructed to move water from one place to another. Swales can help water flow to ponds, wet areas or rain gardens.

Snags, logs, and woody material. Provide nesting, roosting, and foraging for insects and other wildlife. Large decaying logs hold moisture through dry periods for creatures that need it. Carefully placed logs and sticks can also prevent erosion.

Native ground cover. An alternative to lawn for many places.

Rock gardens, walls, or terraces. A beautiful way to reduce runoff and erosion from a sloped area.

Rain gardens. Unlined, vegetated depressions used to collect rainwater. The water soaks into the ground within one or two days after a rainstorm.

Source: Stream Team News, Fall 2020