Landscape Design Series 15
Reducing Landscape Maintenance

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Landscape Design Series
Low Maintenance Landscaping

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Introduction
With busy lifestyles, homeowners are pressed for time.
They seek ways to reduce home landscape maintenance.
The best way to reduce maintenance requirements

- Good design
- Wise plant selection
- Proper planting
Good design pays for itself
Work with nature – not against it
In northern Utah if we don’t plant it then Mother Nature will
A small, well-kept garden is better than acres of weed growth
Many homeowners try to maintain large lawn and garden areas

- Reducing size is often the most straightforward and successful way to reduce landscape maintenance
Visit the landscape regularly and often

• A few minutes of regular maintenance prevents bigger and more frustrating problems
Identify areas that require a more manicured look
Note areas that do not need as much maintenance
There are alternative choices of landscape building materials
Plant types and design strategies reduce effort and expense.
Begin the low maintenance landscape by developing a plan.
Prioritize important areas such as the front entry, views, and patios
Focus your landscape efforts on these areas
Examine underutilized storage areas, fence lines and work areas.
Design these for low maintenance options
Place walks so they are direct and convenient
There is no such thing as a no-maintenance landscape
SIMPLICITY
Simplicity is the watchword for good design and low maintenance.
Eliminate extra frills such as birdbaths, statues and flower beds
Never plant only for variety, let each plant have a definite function.
Creating borders in beds allows easy mowing around the edges
This reduces edging and weeding in scattered plantings
Numerous landscape plants often require more specialized care.
ARRANGEMENT
Arrange plants carefully

- Scattered, cluttered beds need hand edging and complicate mowing
Here are a few suggestions to minimize excessive landscape care
Space plants far enough apart to give them room to grow
Use plants that are adapted to the area
Use plants that are naturally free from diseases and insects
Fertilizing is often unnecessary for well established landscape plants.
Select easy to care for trees, shrubs and groundcovers
They are excellent alternatives to excessive open lawn space.
The first few years may require extra weeding and care
Established trees and shrubs only need a yearly cleanup
Avoid problem or high-maintenance plants
Hybrid tea roses, daylilies and fruit trees are high maintenance plants.
Put the right size plant in the right place
Place plants in masses, not individually
Use a simple palette of easy to care for plants
Select plants that do not create excessive maintenance problems
For example, euonymus and zinnias often require several sprayings to control disease.
Other plants such as arborvitae may require extensive pruning.
Slow-growing plants cost more initially but take less maintenance.
LAWNS
Beautiful lawns are expensive and high-maintenance landscape items.
Reduce the total amount of unused lawn area
Maintain Proper Irrigation
Landscape beds have different moisture requirements than turf.
Plant areas under tree canopy to groundcovers and other plants
Try to resist the desire for perfectly green, weed free turf

- Such turf is expensive and the efforts to achieve it can cause significant problems in the rest of the landscape
Use turf species that require the fewest inputs to maintain
Limit higher maintenance turf areas to where there is the most activity.
Keep mowers and trimmers away from trees/shrubs
When possible, water lawn separately from trees
Many practices are used to maintain a healthy lawn:

- Mowing
- Watering
- Fertilizing
- Pesticides
- Aeration
Lawn edging takes an considerable time and expense
Maintaining proper play and open lawn space are important
Reducing unused lawn can save required care and maintenance.
Keep lawns free from flowers, trees, shrubs, or other obstacles.
To facilitate easy mowing, avoid sharp angles and time traps.
Construct a permanent mow strip on edges of lawn
Avoid grass next to buildings and walls to eliminate hand trimming.
Pavement is easiest but perennials and shrubs also work
Keep the lawn below the sidewalks, drives and edging
Keep grass away from trees, and shrubs for easy mowing
Water only as needed and avoid daily watering
Check sprinkling system by measuring the amount of water
Determine uniformity of distribution
Aerate slopes and compacted lawn areas for better water penetration
Clean sprinkler heads and flush sprinkling lines each spring
Mow Kentucky bluegrass at 2 - 3 inches
Never remove more than one third of the blade in a single mowing
Do not pick up clippings as they reduce the fertilizer requirements
Apply water and fertilizer as needed.
A well-fertilized lawn crowds out many weeds.
GROUND COVERS
Use ground covers on steep slopes and other difficult to mow areas.
Use shade tolerant groundcovers to replace grass in shady areas
Replace flower borders with ground cover
SELECTING TREES
Avoid using fruit and nut trees over lawns, drives, walks, or patios
Avoid willows, poplars or other trees that drop branches
Avoid shallow rooted trees that sucker and sprout in the lawn
(Willows, aspen, poplars, sumac)
Amend and improve soils prior to planting for long-term growth
Place trees and shrubs inside beds
to avoid edging around them
Where better trees will thrive, avoid planting fast growing trees
Siberian elm, poplars and willows break easily
Train small trees to avoid heavy corrective pruning later on.
Hire professional arborists to prune large trees
Use male trees that produce no seeds or fruit
Try to use plants that require less trimming and pruning
Prune trees so the wind passes through them without damage
Prune lower limbs and branches to let more light reach the grass
SELECTING SHRUBS
Use dwarf shrubs and trees to eliminate excessive pruning
Established shrub borders need less watering and pruning
Avoid clipped hedges
Minimize shearing, hedging and rounding
Try to retain natural shapes
Learn how to prune/trim properly
WEED CONTROL
Do not permit weeds to go to seed
Use weed-free manures and mulching materials
Spray fence lines, lawn edges and waste areas to keep weeds out
Use bark, sawdust, lawn clippings or other mulches to control weeds.
Mulching reduces weeds in garden beds and borders
Remove weeds when they are small for best control
Use a gliding hoe on small weeds in vegetable and flower gardens
Avoid walks with open joints or those that fill up with weeds.
Avoid rock gardens that require hand weeding
Pave driveways, walks, and parking strips to eliminate weeds.
Use ground cover to control weeds on slopes and other areas.
Use geotextiles for weed control in shrub beds
Control pre-existing problem weeds before covering soil
Geotextiles allow water and oxygen to roots while plastics do not.
Control bindweed and other perennial weeds with herbicides
Pre-emergent herbicides help reduce weeds

• Use sparingly and only when a significant weed crop is anticipated
• Don’t use every year since they can build up in the soil and inhibit growth of some landscape plants
Use post-emergent herbicides only when needed
Many trees are often damaged by herbicides
Avoid spraying herbicides when trees are leafing out.
Spot spray whenever possible
Do not use ground sterilants such as atrazine or pramitol.
Glyphosate products are the safest post-emergent herbicides.
Establish five to six foot (minimum) mulch rings around trees
Consider mulching to the dripline and expanding as the tree grows.
Spray for perennial lawn weeds in fall (if needed)
Power equipment speeds your maintenance time
Buy quality mowers, tools, and equipment and take care of them
Cheap equipment is seldom a bargain in the end.
Keep the mower and tools in good repair, sharp and free from rust.
Provide an adequate, orderly, dry tool storage space
Use a garden cart or wheelbarrow to move heavy loads.
String trimmers are fast and easy to use for many garden tasks.
Keep trimmers away from trees as they seriously damage the bark.
Provide a tool storage area easily available to your work areas
Provide a place to store outdoor furniture and grills
MISCELLANEOUS
Keep drive edges free from plants to facilitate snow removal
Use low maintenance materials for fences, walls, and enclosures
HARDSCAPES
Use durable materials to build or replace landscape structures
Choose materials that do not require frequent replacement
Sidewalks, patios, decks, fences, or driveways must take our climate
Select quality seating, trellis, gazebos, and furniture
A concrete or brick patio will last between 20-30 years.
A wooden deck may need replacing every 5-8 years
Recycled plastic lumber has a much longer life span
Vinyl reduces painting or staining compared to wood fences.
Concrete, brick or stone edging lasts longer than railroad ties
• Consider the initial cost and maintenance to long term cost and durability when selecting landscape materials.
PATHS
When foot traffic is heavy, plants need help.
Pave areas with concrete or spread compacted crushed stone or gravel
Make sure all access walks, stairs, paths, and gates are wide enough
Allow sufficient width for lawn-maintenance equipment
FENCES OR HEDGES FOR PRIVACY
Consider hiding an unsightly view or gaining privacy.
A well-built fence serves as

- a property divider
- gives privacy
- makes an excellent backdrop for shrubbery
- Requires much less space than shrubs
A fence may take less care than plants
Select plants for a low-maintenance hedge
EDGING
Use metal or brick edging between the lawn and gravel walks or drives
This eliminates tedious trimming and keeps stones out of the lawn.
Edging makes an attractive border by defining the design more clearly.
The End
For More Information Contact Your Local Utah State University Extension Office