Reducing Landscape Maintenance

Larry A. Sagers
Horticulture Specialist
Utah State University
Thanksgiving Point Office
Thanksgiving Gardens
Lehi, Utah
Garden Tours

- Information on www.larrysagers.com
How Do Most Yards Get Landscaped?

• Is it By Landscape Architects?
• Is It By Landscape Contractors?
• Is It by Local Nurseries?
How Do Most Yards Get Landscaped?

• Ask Yourself This Question
How Do Most Yards Get Landscaped?

The Answer Is Simple…
How Do Most Yards Get Landscaped?

It Is Plants on Sale !!!
How Do Most Yards Get Landscaped?
Most Homeowner Vehicles are Trained to Stop Whenever They Detect the Magic Word SALE
How Do Most Yards Get Landscaped?

There is nothing wrong with bargains but make certain you are getting assets and not liabilities.
WHERE DO YOU WANT ME TO PLANT IT, HONEY?
I'm going to leave the planting part completely up to you, dear.
I'm sure you'll think of the perfect spot for our new little tree.

You betcha!
IF YOU PLANT IT THERE IT'LL END UP SHADING YOUR FLOWER BED
THAT'S NO GOOD EITHER... AFTER IT GROWS THE BRANCHES WILL SCRAPE YOUR ROOF.
THIS WON'T WORK EITHER! IT'LL SPOIL MY VIEW OF THE SUNSET
YOU KNOW, YOU REALLY DON'T HAVE A GOOD SPOT FOR IT ANYWHERE IN YOUR YARD
DID YOU FIND THE RIGHT PLACE FOR IT, HONEY?

YEP, SURE DID
With busy lifestyles, homeowners are pressed for time.
Everyone wants ways to reduce home landscape maintenance.
The best way to reduce maintenance requirements

- Good design
- Wise plant selection
- Proper planting and care
The best way to reduce maintenance requirements

Remember The 80/20 Rule
You spend 80% of your time and money on 20% of your landscape.
Good design pays for itself
Work with nature – not against it
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
Select alternative landscape building materials
Plant types and design strategies reduce effort and expense.
Begin by developing a low maintenance design and calendar
Focus on the front entry, views, patios and other high use areas
Design less utilized storage and work areas for low maintenance
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.
Arrange plants carefully

- Scattered, cluttered plants need hand edging and complicate mowing
Space plants far enough apart to give them room to grow.
PLANT SELECTION AND CARE
Use plants that are adapted to the area
Use plants that are naturally free from diseases and insects
Select easy-care for trees, shrubs and groundcovers instead of excessive open lawn space.
The first few years may require extra weeding and care.
Established trees and shrubs may only need a yearly cleanup.
Avoid problem or high-maintenance plants
Hybrid tea roses, daylilies and fruit trees are high maintenance plants.
Select plants that do not create excessive maintenance problems
For example, euonymus and zinnias often require several sprayings to control disease.
Slow-growing plants cost more initially but take less maintenance.
Maintaining lawns
Beautiful lawns are expensive and high-maintenance landscape items.
Reduce the total amount of unused lawn area
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

• It 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 practice are used to maintain a healthy lawn

- Mowing
- Watering
- Fertilizing
- Pesticides
- Aeration
Lawn edging takes considerable time and expense
Maintaining proper open space is important.
Keep lawns free from flowers, trees, shrubs, or other obstacles
To facilitate easy mowing, avoid small, odd-shaped time traps.
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
EDGING
Edging makes an attractive border by defining the design more clearly
MANAGE YOUR WATER
Avoid wasting and over watering
Check sprinkling system by measuring the amount of water
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.
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
REDUCING TREE MAINTENANCE
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)
Siberian elm, poplars and willows break easily
Where better trees will thrive, avoid planting fast growing trees
Train small trees to avoid heavy corrective pruning later on.
Hire professional arborists to prune large trees
Use male trees or those that produce no seeds or fruit
Use plants that require less trimming and pruning
Prune trees so the wind passes through them without damage
Topping is never acceptable!
SHRUB MAINTAINENCE
Use dwarf shrubs and trees to eliminate excessive pruning
Avoid clipped hedges
Minimize shearing, hedging and rounding
Try to retain natural shapes
Learn how to prune/trim properly
Shrubs need attention when plants are small and manageable.
Successful Maintenance Starts With The Right Plant In The Right Place
The Right Plant
In The Right Place
(Too Small)
The Right Plant
In The Right Place
(Too Large)
Typical Improper Pruning
How to Prune?

- When pruning you have your choice of cuts
How to Prune?

• Heading cuts stimulates latent bud growth
How to Prune?

- Thinning cuts direct or stimulate growth in another branch
How to Prune?

- Removal cuts take out entire stems or trunks
Never Prune Evergreen Shrubs into Non foliage Areas
Why did they do this?
Why did they plant these?
Needs Pruning
Improperly Pruned
Correctly Pruned
WEEDS
The Worst Landscape Pest
Do not permit weeds to go to seed
Use weed-free manures and mulching materials
Use bark, sawdust, lawn clippings or other mulches to control weeds.
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
Use ground cover to control weeds on slopes and other areas.
Use geotextiles in shrub beds but control pre-existing problem weeds
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.
Spray for perennial lawn weeds in fall (if needed)
TOOLS AND EQUIPMENT
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.
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
HARDSCAPES
Use low maintenance materials for fences, walls, and enclosures
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
Check true costs

- Consider the initial cost and maintenance to long term cost and durability when selecting landscape materials
PATHWAYS
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.
FENCES OR HEDGES FOR 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
The End