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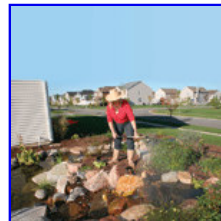


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Low-water Landscapes

...From the pages of Suburban Home and Garden Resource Guide...

Attractive landscapes that conserve resources, money and time.



Mention low-water landscaping to most homeowners and visions of rocks, sand and desert plants spring to mind. While cactus gardens might be the norm in the arid southwest, here in the mid-Atlantic a low-water landscape means choosing trees, shrubs, groundcover plants, flower gardens, grass and hardscape elements like pavers and stonework that have water conservation in mind.

There are many advantages to having low-water landscapes, including conserving natural resources and saving homeowners money on their monthly water bills. They also cut down on maintenance requirements, so busy homeowners can spend more time enjoying their gardens and less time watering and working around the yard.

The Look of a Low-Water Landscape

One of the hallmarks of a low-water landscape is reducing or even completely eliminating the lawn. "Turf grass uses the most amount of water of any landscape," says Aimee Bentley, a horticulturist and environmental designer who owns Horticulturist for Hire in Glendora, NJ, a company that specializes in the design and installation of niche gardens. "Native plants are better for conserving water in the landscape because they are better adapted to local growing conditions and require less watering." To accomplish her goal of creating sustainable, water-efficient, low-maintenance gardens for her clients, Bentley uses native plants such as purple coneflower and sedums in her cottage and Victorian garden creations. Another element that can be used in a low-water landscape is a layer of mulch, which holds moisture in, allowing it to nourish plants and shrubbery for a longer period of time than simple topsoil. Erica Metzgar of Victory Gardens, a Warminster, PA-based mulch and topsoil wholesaler, believes wholeheartedly in the benefits of using mulch around plantings. "Triple-shredded mulch is our top-selling product," she says.

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While a low-water landscape uses less water, that's not to say it doesn't use any water at all. "Watering plants is important, especially when they're becoming established," says Bentley. To make water usage count, Bentley prefers drip irrigation systems that lie just below the surface of the soil over traditional water sprinklers. "Drip irrigation delivers water where plants need it most, right to the root system," she says.

Using Water for Visual Interest

Believe it or not, water features like ponds and waterfalls have their place in a low-water landscape. James Ponds in Doylestown, PA, an Aquascape Certified contractor, sells a

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complete line of low-use water features that include pondless waterfalls, decorative bubblers and urn fountains and ponds -- with or without fish. "Our specialty water features not only conserve water, [but also] most of our products are made from recycled materials," says owner Diane Baker. Baker adds that the ponds are constructed as complete ecosystems so that they are completely natural, with no harsh chemicals needed that could have toxic run-off and harm the environment. The company installs these water features but also offers a lower priced consultation service to the do-it-yourselfer who wants to purchase a water feature but do the installation themselves. Most of the water features are also energy efficient. "About 80 percent of our customers use high-efficiency pumps, which cost about \$25 per month to run as opposed to a regular pump that costs about \$100 a month," says Baker. Homeowners can also save on energy costs by turning off the pumps when they are not in use and topping off the water levels every so often to counteract water loss that occurs due to splashing and evaporation.

For conservation-conscious homeowners looking for a rainwater harvesting system to irrigate their landscapes, James Ponds recently started selling a line of 75-gallon rainwater barrels that are both decorative and functional, featuring a planter on top for highlighting aquatic plants. Baker says that rainwater harvesting is much more popular in the southwest but is slowly catching on here in the northeast. "We're trying to [help our customers] make the leap to rainwater harvesting," says Baker. "It's just a matter of time."

Find Out More

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Author: Heleigh Bostwick; Photo courtesy of Aquascape, Inc.

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