

Designing a Low Maintenance Landscape

Most acreage owners prefer a landscape that requires minimal maintenance. To accomplish this goal, planning is required.

Planning begins with a thorough study of problem areas, desirable areas, site conditions and finally a study of the user's needs. This will lead to identifying the uses or functions of the public, private and service areas of the yard.

There are particular conditions in a landscape that relate specifically to maintenance.

One is the topography, otherwise known as the rise and fall of the land. A high maintenance situation exists where a steep slope requires mowing. Alternatives to mowing include planting a groundcover that doesn't require mowing. Another alternative might be installing terraces and retaining walls.

Soil type and drainage are other important factors relating to maintenance. A complete soil test will indicate your soil type, pH, and nutrient levels. Selecting plant material adapted for your soil will save on maintenance.

Climate and microclimate are other important site conditions to consider. Selecting plants hardy for your area will reduce maintenance needs. Microclimates include those areas unusually wet or dry, shady or sunny.

Choose plants adapted for those specific situations. Plants should be selected based on their ability to fill your design requirements rather than price.

Select those species of plants that grow to the desired height and spread. It doesn't make sense to plant a shrub that is going to overgrow its location in a few short years. Plant spacing is determined by the individual plant. However, plants look their best when allowed to mature into their natural shape.



Photo courtesy of USDA NRCS

A pond is the focal point of this backyard scene

At first plants properly spaced may look too small for the area, but given a little time, they will fill in nicely. Additionally, plants that are properly selected and spaced should have no need for drastic pruning to keep them in line.

Structural features in the landscape such as sidewalks, patios, decks, fences and steps should also be selected with maintenance in mind.

A concrete patio or walk should be maintenance free for 10 to 15 years, if properly installed. Asphalt should be sealed about every two years to keep the edges from breaking. Wooden structures requiring paint may need a fresh coat every few years. Redwood, cedar or pressure treated wood should have a life span of about 20 years. Brick set on sand may need resetting every three to five years, where brick set in mortar should last 20 to 30 years. When considering various landscape and construction materials, compare the initial cost and maintenance to long-term cost and durability.

Other features of low

maintenance landscapes include the use of planting beds rather than isolated plantings. It is much easier to mow around a bed with a continuous edge rather than around individual plants. Grouping plants with similar cultural needs saves time both in site preparation and installation as well as continued cultural care.

The use of a mulch around the base of plants aids plant growth and often eliminates hand trimming. The proper installation of edging materials such as plastic or steel will also save on maintenance by keeping mulch in and lawn out. It too should eliminate hand trimming.

Construction materials such as patio pavers or stepping stones are better choices for high traffic areas that won't allow the successful growth of grass or other groundcover.

There is no such thing as a landscape that takes care of itself. However, proper planning, selection and installation of landscape plants and structures will reduce the amount of time a landscape requires to look its best. (DJ)

Urban Agriculture



Free Disease Testing for Backyard Poultry Flocks

University of the Nebraska Cooperative Extension now has a full-time diagnostic poultry veterinarian, Dr. Grasso Ebako, who is part of the Department of Veterinary and Biomedical Sciences.

Among other duties, Dr. Ebako has received a grant from the Nebraska Poultry Industries to do poultry diseases surveillance in the state of Nebraska, focusing on backyard poultry farms. More than a dozen diseases are monitored, including West Nile Virus and Avian Influenza.

Because some backyard flocks do not vaccinate their

birds, they are a serious threat to the entire poultry industry in the state, says Dr. Ebako.

The grant pays for Dr. Ebako to make farm visits and take blood and fecal samples for testing. He also educates and emphasizes the importance of:

- disease prevention
- disease control
- biosecurity measures
- bioterrorism measures.

These services would normally cost more than \$300.

People with backyard poultry flocks can set up an appointment by calling 472-1434.

New Pesticide Disposal Instructions

The EPA Pesticide Registration Notice 2001-6 has set new disposal instructions for empty and partially filled **non-antimicrobial, residential/household use pesticide products**. The new instructions are printed on the labels and are as follows:

Pressurized Containers

- a) Do not puncture or incinerate.
- b) **If empty:** Place in trash or offer for recycling, if available.
- c) **If partially filled:** Call your local solid waste agency for disposal instructions.

Non-Pressurized Containers

- a) **If empty:** Do not reuse this container. Place in trash or offer for recycling if available.
- b) **If partially filled:** Call your local solid waste agency for disposal instructions.

In Lancaster County, the agency for disposal instructions is the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department. Visit its Web site at www.ci.lincoln.ne.us/city/health or call 441-8000. (DJ)

NU Landscape Connections – A Showcase Event

Festival of Color and Gardener's Gala have combined to form one event. The new program name is: NU Landscape Connections. It will be held on Sept. 14, from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on the University of Nebraska East Campus. This event is free to the public.

NU Landscape Connections will allow a sharing of resources among university programs while allowing the university to showcase its academic programs, research, award-winning campus landscapes and scientific expertise.

The theme and focus of this program builds on a strong personal connection of Nebraska's people to the university and includes:

- a deeper appreciation of our universal connection to nature and plants;
- better understanding of the connection between science, design and functionality of beautiful outdoor environments as are showcased at the



PHOTO courtesy of UNL Botanical Garden and Arboretum

Yuetter Garden is one of the many gardens on East Campus which will be part of NU Landscape Connections Sept. 14.

University of Nebraska - Lincoln Botanical Garden and Arboretum (UNLBGA);

- cooperation among UNL units to broaden sensitivity to the sustainability and environmental friendliness of built land-

scapes;

- and perhaps most important, a greater awareness of Nebraska's urban and rural landscape richness.

Additional event attractions include:

- **Tours:** Maxwell Arboretum, Larson Tractor Museum
- **Design:** principles, perceptions, natural landscaping
- **Ornamentals:** grasses, shrubs, trees, perennials
- **Maintenance:** soil, turf, pruning, flower beds
- **Wildlife:** butterflies, birds, snakes, bats
- **Ponds:** site, equipment, plants, algae, fish
- **Also:** growing organic, antique tools, flower arranging,

vendors, children's activities and much more!

The event is sponsored by the UNLBGA/Landscape Services, the Friends of Maxwell Arboretum and the UNL Institute of Agricultural and Natural Resources, including Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, Department of Agronomy/Horticulture and Division of Cooperative Extension.

For more information, call 472-2679. (DJ)

Other August/September UNL Programs and Events of Interest

- Aug. 22 **"The Art of Nature: The Nature of Avian Art,"** Dr. Paul A. Johnsgard, Prof. of Biological Sciences, Nebraska Union, 14th & R St., 7-8:30 pm. Call 472-2679 to pre-register.
- Sept. 4 **East Campus Prairie Tour,** Jeff Culbertson, East Campus landscape manager, meet east of C. Y. Thompson Library, 12:20-12:50 p.m. Call 472-2679.