



# First Steps to Creating a Eco-friendly, low Maintenance Landscape

[www.Melindamyers.com](http://www.Melindamyers.com)



## Design with Maintenance and Pollinators in Mind

### Start with a Plan

- Make a sketch of existing landscape
- Use tracing paper to draw overlays

Note weather and soil conditions, wind, sun, low spots....

How can you save energy with plantings

Trees on east and west side of house shade windows –cooling

Trees that cast shade on roof – cool attic and house

Avoid South side

or use deciduous trees that cast minimal shade

winter sun from south – solar heating of home

Foundation plantings and groundcovers help keep homes cool

<https://projectevergreen.org/about/resources/#toggle-id-3>

Trees not only cast shade but help manage water

<https://www.milorganite.com/blog/trees-shrubs/how-trees-help-manage-water-your-lawn-and-landscape>

Make every space count

- Look for underutilized areas to create attractive spaces, transitions in the landscape or grow edibles

Preserve Beautiful Views and Screen unsightly views or create privacy

### Screening Options

Consider diverse plantings

Increases seasonal interest

Reduces risk of insect or disease destroying the whole planting

Creates homes for beneficial insects, birds and desirable wildlife

Create a screen that fits your landscape design and gardening style

### Design in Functional Spaces

Edible gardens

Out of the way OR

Outside the backdoor

Front yard

Make it acceptable for the neighborhood

Composting areas

Dual bin composters – great for small yards and urban areas

Mask compost area

Fencing

Walls

## **Manage Water**

Monitor Rainfall in Your landscape

Select Plants suited to your location's "normal" rainfall

Drought tolerant plants

Need to be watered properly until established

Group moisture lovers together

Makes it easier for you to water or irrigate as needed

Waste less water and time

Mulch using materials produced in landscape whenever possible

*Protects soil, suppresses weeds, conserves moisture, and improves the soil as they decompose*

Coarser the mulch material the deeper the mulch

Leaves – great homes for pollinators

Avoid black walnut leaves that are toxic to many plants

Evergreen needles and cones – don't make soil too acidic

Woodchips - go together with neighbors and rent a chipper

Use for paths, trees and shrubs

Use soaker hoses and drip irrigation to apply water to soil

Waste less water

Save time

Manage hoses

Decorative storage options

Strategically placed in landscape

Allows you to connect sections to minimize dragging long lengths of hose

### **Install a rain barrel if your municipality allows**

Capture rainwater for use watering containers and gardens

623 gallons of rain water run off 1000sq ft of roof in a 1" rain

Purchase or make your own

Screen or cover to keep out debris and pests

Spigot low on the barrel – so water does not stagnate

An overflow outlet is necessary for periods of heavy rain

& for interlocking several barrels.

Or downspout diverter to manage rain barrel overflows.

Elevate the rain barrel – increase flow & access for filling watering can

Paint or mask with fencing or plantings

Mosquito Dunks to manage mosquitoes - an organic product

Rain barrel Installation and other useful tips from

Fresh Coast Guardians

<https://www.freshcoastguardians.com/resources/green-strategies/rain-barrels-cisterns>

## **Grow Rain Gardens**

Rain gardens are designed & situated in a landscape to intercept water running off the roof, walks, drive and the lawn before it reaches the storm sewer

As with all gardens proper soil preparation is critical.

Select plants that tolerate flooding and drought

Placement is important

- Water must move away from your house & drain

- At least 10 feet away from your house.

- Keep it away from septic systems and trees

- Locate the garden on a slight slope away from the house

Use swales, downspouts, and underground PVC to direct water to the garden.

No yearly fertilizer needed, Spring cleanup, divide plants as needed  
Watch for my Rain Garden Installation Video – coming soon

Milorganite and Fresh Coast Guardians Resources

<https://www.freshcoastguardians.com/resources/green-strategies/rain-gardens>

<https://www.milorganite.com/search-results?strSearch=rain%20gardens#gsc.tab=0&gsc.q=rain%20gardens&gsc.page=1>

WI DNR Rain Garden Manual for Homeowners and Landscapers

<https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Stormwater/documents/RainGardenManual.pdf>

StormGUARDen

- Capacity of 6.5 rain barrels

- Plants help clean water before stored

- <https://www.stormguarden.com>

Dry River Beds

- Manage water that collects during certain times of the season

## **Lawns**

How much lawn area do you need and want to manage?

- Grass makes nice play surface, paths

- Provides connectivity in landscape

- Does help slow and absorb water

- Cools home

But there are more pollinator friendly options

- Consider suitable alternatives

### No Mow Lawn

Mow monthly to create lawn-like appearance

Mow once a year for a meadow

Pennsylvania Sedge – *Carex pennsylvanica*

Shade tolerant – grass-like plant

### Groundcovers

Shade tolerant for shady areas like those under trees

Mixture of plants for seasonal interest

Groundcover beds - Protect trees and shrubs from mowers

They are less competition than grass for water and nutrients

Plants also help slow water so more can be absorbed into soil-  
less runs off

### **Don't change the grade around trees**

Plant in existing soil

Work compost into planting hole if needed

Mulch & Proper watering first two years

### Mulch around trees and shrubs and for pathways

2-3" layer of woodchips around trees and shrubs

Do NOT pile mulch against trunk of the tree or over crown of plants

### Use Landscape fabric – weed barrier carefully

Can girdle plantings

As organic mulches break down – forms compost for weed seeds to  
sprout and grow and turf to encroach and cover mulched area

Prevents compost from improving the soil below

Best use is under stone – keeps stones out of soil

### Create or expand a Mulch Bed

Reduce Maintenance - create mulch bed around individual trees & shrubs

Mow grass and weeds as short as possible

Edge Bed

Cover with cardboard or newspaper and mulch

## **Hard Surfaces in Landscape**

Permeable – let's water through to soil below

Fit landscape design and goals

Can manage surface in weather conditions as needed

A few examples

Pea Gravel

Sound, feel under feet, can't shovel, challenging for sitting

Stepping stones with thyme

Hot dry areas

Fragrant

Stepping stones with moss

Shady locations

Permeable Pavers

Allows water through

Sweep off organic debris that can clog openings

Permeable Driveways and parking areas

Permeable Pavers

Grids filled with grass or gravel

Make sure it can support weight and frequency of use

Plantable Drive

Hard surface for tires

In between is a low growing garden or grass

<https://www.milorganite.com/blog/garden-landscape/permeable-pavement-in-landscapes>

## **Plants and Planting Beds**

### **Make sure you can maintain the integrity of your design**

Right size and shape plant for the space

Manageable pruning schedule

Generate less wood waste

Select Plants suited to your Climate and Growing Conditions

Winter cold, summer heat, wind, sunlight and soil

Soil Test

Right Plant for all growing conditions

Plant suited to growing conditions will be healthier

Less work for you

Fewer pest problems, better able too tolerate adverse conditions

Outcompete weeds

You spend less time, effort and chemicals to keep them thriving

Native Plants whenever possible and suited to growing conditions

[www.atc-growsmart.com](http://www.atc-growsmart.com)

Good for our pollinators and songbirds providing food and shelter

Most provide several seasons of beauty

Most are drought tolerant once established

Do not need regular fertilization

The aboveground portion slows water, deep roots provide

channels for water to travel to and reach groundwater

Along the way the roots and soil help remove impurities

Native and non-native, non-invasive plants

Research out of UK finding non native extend food source for pollinators

Select Low Maintenance Plants

Not invasive or aggressive

No deadheading or yearly division needed

No invasive plants

If it sounds too good to be true it probably is

Some invasive or those on watch lists are still being sold

A few resources

<https://www.invasiveplantatlas.org>

<https://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/invasives/>

Look for plants that attract and support

Birds

Hummingbirds

Butterflies

Bees

Desirable Wildlife

## **Creating Garden Beds**

Combine plants that require same growing conditions

Equally aggressive

Colors and textures complement each Other

Combination provides year round interest, and habitat for pollinators

*Know Maintenance* by Roy Diblik

Less is More

Consider dividing the number of species used in half and  
doubling the number of each

Greater impact

Easier to ID in spring

Less individual/unique maintenance requirements

Easier for someone to help you weed and manage

Proper spacing

Temporarily fill voids with annuals and perennials

As shrubs and trees grow need fewer annuals – move perennials

The Design

Consider Style

Pollinator appeal

Maintenance - Make it easy

Plant in Masses

Pollinators use less energy gathering pollen

Easier for you to maintain

Greater impact

Provide multiple layers

Better viewing

Provides habitat for various pollinators

Provide access to plants for weeding and...

Mowable edge

Gentle curves - no tight corners

Eliminate need for hand trimming

Avoid damage to plants

## Converting Lawn to Garden

Consider Method that best fits your time, budget and resources

Always Contact Diggers Hotline or  
your State's Underground Utility Locating Service  
3 business days before digging  
It's FREE  
Call 811 or file online (In WI its diggershotline.com)

Mark Bed with hose, rope or ...

Edge the bed

Slows infiltration of weeds and grass back into garden

Remove Sod

Use to patch bare spots in lawn

Compost – green side down

Create new garden beds

Place green side down

Sprinkle each layer with Milorganite to speed decomposition

Cover with plastic for winter to kill weed seeds, grass...

Plant in spring

Edge Bed and Solarize to kill grass and weeds

Cover with clear plastic

Best results - 6 weeks during hottest weather

Work Soil when moist not wet

Grab handful of soil, gently squeeze, tap with finger

If it breaks into smaller pieces read to work

If not wait - wait

Working wet soil results in clods and cracking

Working overly dry soil – pulverizes and ruins structure

Add organic matter if needed

Add several inches to top 8 to 12" inches before planting

Improves water holding ability and drainage

Good time to incorporate fertilizer

Milorganite a good choice as it is low nitrogen,

slow release, helps make some of the phosphorus and

potassium bound to the soil available to the plants

Contains 85% organic matter

No till method

Using cover crops and organic mulches to improve the soil

Another Option – especially if lawn is healthy –soil is probably suitable

Edge Bed

Cut grass short

Cover with newspaper or cardboard and organic mulch

Plant immediately –

Will need to cut through cardboard and turf – challenging

Or Wait a season for cardboard and turf to break down to plant

## **Create Your own Planting media**

*For more detailed information on Creating and Improving Garden Soil*

*Check out webinar available on Demand [Save Money and Improve Your Soil for Better Gardening Results](#)*

<https://www.melindamyers.com/about-melinda/upcoming-appearances>

### Lasagna Gardening

Using landscape trimmings to create garden soil

[https://www.melindamyers.com/audio-video/melindas-garden-moment-videos/sustainable-gardening/build-great-garden-soil-with-lasagna-gardening?ccm\\_paging\\_p=11](https://www.melindamyers.com/audio-video/melindas-garden-moment-videos/sustainable-gardening/build-great-garden-soil-with-lasagna-gardening?ccm_paging_p=11)

### Hugelkultur

Many years of improved moisture and nutrient retention

[https://www.melindamyers.com/audio-video/melindas-garden-moment-videos/sustainable-gardening/hugelkultur-hill-or-mound-gardening?ccm\\_paging\\_p=4](https://www.melindamyers.com/audio-video/melindas-garden-moment-videos/sustainable-gardening/hugelkultur-hill-or-mound-gardening?ccm_paging_p=4)

### Greiten Method

[https://www.melindamyers.com/audio-video/melindas-garden-moment-videos/sustainable-gardening/trench-and-sheet-composting-in-the-garden?ccm\\_paging\\_p=6](https://www.melindamyers.com/audio-video/melindas-garden-moment-videos/sustainable-gardening/trench-and-sheet-composting-in-the-garden?ccm_paging_p=6)

## **Raised Beds**

Fill with planting media you create or purchased quality topsoil blended mix

<https://www.milorganite.com/blog/garden-landscape/whats-difference-between-topsoil-compost-and-potting-mix>

**Keep these strategies in mind as you adapt or develop a Beautiful Eco-friendly low Maintenance Landscape for you and the pollinators to enjoy!**

***Help Me Grow a Kinder and Gentler World –  
one gardener and garden at a time!***

## **Join Me**

**October 21 at 6:30 pm for *Selecting the Best Hydrangeas for your landscape***

**October 28 at 6:30 pm for *Why Won't my hydrangea bloom and other issues***

## **Stay Connected**

www.melindamyers.com - audio & video tips, FAQ's, green tips and more –

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Birds & Blooms, Blooms & Blooms Extra Magazines

Midwest Gardener's Handbook

Can't Miss Small Space Gardening, Midwest Lawn Guides

Minnesota & Wisconsin Getting Started Gardener's Guide

Month-by-Month Gardening in Minnesota & Wisconsin



Michigan Getting Started Gardener's Guide, Month-by Month Gardening in Michigan  
Month-by-Month Gardening in Iowa,

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*Your Best Garden & Landscape in 6 Lessons,*  
*Container Gardening Tips and Techniques,*  
*Make your Trees and Shrubs Thrive and*  
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