

ENVIRONMENTAL GARDENING



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PLAN CAREFULLY

Choose plants that do well at your site. Misplaced plants-those in sun, soil, and/or water conditions contrary to their needs-will require extra water, fertilizer, and pesticides, and may not survive. Group plants that have the same water requirements. Tree placement can impact home heating and cooling bills. Trees soak up solar heat and may help lower air conditioning bills by as much as 25%. Because of the sun's angle, most of the heat strikes east and west windows, not the south as commonly believed. Since the highest energy use occurs in late afternoon, shading west windows with deciduous trees should be a top priority. Minnesotans spend 10 times more for heating than cooling. Winter sun shining in south windows accounts for 5% to 20% of the energy needed to heat your home. It's important that south windows not be shaded in the winter. A windbreak is made up of evergreen trees, branched to the ground, and twice as tall as the building you are trying to protect.

SELECT LOW MAINTENANCE PLANTS

Choose plants that physically fit the site. If you want a shrub to attain a height of 6', select a Miss Kim Lilac or an Isanti Dogwood, for example. These varieties only grow to 6', unlike their taller "parents" which grow to over 10'. Many new plant varieties are also bred to be especially pest and disease resistance, lessening the need for pesticides.

KEEP SOIL IN PEAK CONDITION

Almost any soil benefits from the addition of compost, peat moss, or other organic matter. Soil that is well prepared at planting time will enhance plant health, reducing the use of pesticides and fertilizer. Help soil by mulching around plants. Mulches such as shredded hardwood or wood chips keep soil cool, maintain even moisture, control weed growth, and prevent soil erosion.

WATER PROPERLY

Water in the early morning to reduce evaporation. Water at the root zone, not with overhead sprinklers, whenever possible. Don't overwater - most landscapes are overwatered as much as 40%. In general, plants will respond best to thorough but infrequent waterings. Place hoses so significant runoff does not occur on driveways, sidewalks, and other paved surfaces.

DON'T EXPECT PERFECTION

Over-application of chemicals, in an effort to grow the perfect vegetable or lawn, is very harmful to the environment. There are hundreds of insects and diseases - it is unrealistic to expect no blemishes. And remember, not all insects are harmful. Some, such as ladybugs, eat the bugs that do the real damage in your garden. Chemicals must be used responsibly. Never mix stronger than recommended. Not only is this environmentally harmful, it could make the chemical ineffective. For example, some weed killers, mixed too strong, simply burn off the top of the weed and won't kill the root. If the roots are not killed, the weeds will be back in no time. Don't use chemicals that aren't specifically labeled for your plant. Follow safety and weather precautionary statements. Store chemicals in a safe place and don't let them freeze. Don't mix more chemicals than you need at one time and always dispose of chemicals responsibly. Consider using organic gardening techniques and biological controls.

Always sweep up any granular fertilizer that gets on sidewalks, driveways, patios, and other hard surfaces. Don't allow grass clippings or leaves to sit in street gutters. Fertilizer and organic material that gets swept into the storm sewers are major sources of the phosphorous that turns lakes green.

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