

# LOW MAINTENANCE GARDENING



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**LAWNS** - *Do not over-fertilize, especially in the spring.* Too much nitrogen in the spring will simply increase your time behind the mower. Two fertilizations in the fall (early September and again in very late October - early November) and one application in the spring (May) is recommended for most lawns. *Do not bag grass clippings.* Clippings do not increase the thatch layer and will decompose quickly to add nutrients to the soil. The trick is to mow often enough so the clippings don't windrow behind the mower. Over the course of a summer, you will save lots of time by not having to stop every few minutes to empty the grass catcher. *Install edging and mulch around the base of trees.* Not only is this good for the trees, but it will eliminate tedious hand clipping. By replacing the grass around the trunk with mulch, you remove the need to use lawn mowers or weed eaters near the trunk and can prevent accidental damage to the tree from these tools. *Install lawn edging correctly.* Install edging at the correct depth and secure well

so the mower rides along the lip easily without damaging the top edge. *Reduce lawn areas.* An immense green space may be the stuff of fairy tale estates, but most people don't have time to maintain such an expanse. Replace grass with patios, shrub beds, ground covers, and flower beds. Any slopes that are too steep to comfortably mow should be terraced or planted in low maintenance plants.

**TREES AND SHRUBS** - *Use plants suited to the site.* Learn the cultural requirements of your favorite plants and position them accordingly. Don't put a moisture-loving plant on the open southwest corner of your sandy-soiled lot. Don't put a shade-lover against the south side of your white house. Know that you will have to baby a plant that doesn't appreciate our winters. *Keep the mature heights and spreads of plants in mind.* Nothing is sadder than seeing an evergreen which will get 50' tall someday planted under a first story eave. *Don't crowd plants.* Although some beds may look anemic to start with, giving plants the space they need will keep them healthier and reduce pruning demands. *Use dwarf varieties of shrubs.* Instead of trying to keep a Common Purple Lilac contained in a 4' space, consider using a Dwarf Korean Lilac. Many shrubs have shorter, slimmer cousins that require less pruning. *Group plants according to their water needs.* Planting moisture-loving ferns next to drought tolerant succulents is asking for trouble. Someone will be unhappy. *Install shrubs in mulch beds.* Not only will this reduce the lawn area you need to take care of, but the shrubs' roots will be cooler and will not dry out as fast. Design the mulch beds so they can easily be mowed around.

**GARDENS** - *Select plant varieties that are aggressive enough to compete with weeds.* This may be a balancing act as you don't want varieties that will turn into weeds themselves! *Use plant varieties which are pest and disease resistant.* The seed packet or plant label will indicate the variety's abilities along these lines. *Keep drainage in mind when planning a new garden.* Proper initial grading will save hours of work and heartache in the future. If necessary, install raised beds. *Consider installing a drip irrigation system.* Properly designed and installed, an irrigation system can aid water conservation and save time. Don't blindly set the timer and forget it, however. Adjustments have to be made for the prevailing weather. How many times have you seen automatic sprinklers going during a rainstorm? *Mulch between plants.* This will reduce weeds and conserve moisture. Organic mulches slowly decompose to aid the soil. *Keep planting beds accessible.* Plan beds to be narrow enough for reaching to the back or make room for stepping pads.

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