



Landscaping

do's & don'ts

By Kati Schardl

Say you have two yards, side by side in your neighborhood. One is a vision of harmony, with elements that draw the eye and interesting touches – colors, textures and placement of plants – that work together to create a visually satisfying whole. The other is a hodge-podge of mismatched shrubs, spindly ferns and crowded flower beds that make for a chaotic, jarring spectacle.

Most everyone wants the first kind of landscape, but how do you achieve it? These 10 tips will set any yard well on its way.



10 tips for making your yard a prettier place

1 Do make a plan. Sketch out how you want your landscape to look and don't be afraid to copy ideas from yards you've seen that appeal to your aesthetic.

2 Do visualize your landscape five to 10 years down the road and plant accordingly. Think about the growth rates and habits of plants and trees you want to include. A scrawny shrublet can grow into a giant.

3 Do execute your plan in phases. It'll save money and time in the long run.

4 Do use native plants when possible. They'll be less expensive to maintain and more likely to thrive.

5 Do indulge your whimsy. Yard ornaments, secret seating areas, water features and elements such as rock borders or picket fencing add visual appeal and a sense of fun.

6 Don't over-plant. A little goes a long way (see No. 2 above).

7 Don't plant anything you can't maintain or add features that won't stand the test of time. This stuff has to stay outside, for goodness sake.

Quick tip

Dirt first

You have to have a good base before you plant the first tree or shrub. Have your soil tested and, if needed, amend it accordingly. Make provisions for easy watering and plant maintenance so that watching your garden grow is a joy and not a chore.

8 Don't forget to consider your landscape's physical features – slopes, shaded areas, proximity of power lines and soil composition will play into what you plant and where. Be realistic about what will work.

9 Don't base your landscape on annuals. They're great for dressing up an established landscape, but perennial plants will reward you for years after the initial investment.

10 Don't panic! If you get stuck in any step of the process, professional advice and assistance is only a phone call or a Web search away.

Take advantage of free advice

Trying to minimize costs but need a little help planning and stocking your landscape? Your local extension service is an excellent free source for ideas and expertise in how to plan and plant a landscape. Many extension service offices will have a garden you can tour with experts who can advise you on the types of plants that do well in your area.

Master gardener chapters and garden clubs are also great resources for knowledge and such groups often freely share plants, as well. You can also find inexpensive or even free plants – often native and heritage varieties – through non-profit nurseries affiliated with historical properties and community gardens.

