

Trends in Residential Landscape Design

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Eco-friendly landscaping is gaining traction. What are the trends?

The first is reducing lawn area. America has a love affair with the pristine lawn that looks like a golf course, but lawns are water hogs and need a lot of fertilizers and pesticides to remain green and lush. And commonly used pesticides get into the water table and streams. Just turning 10 or 15 percent of your lawn to a native shrub border means less care, and less harm to the environment.

Native Northeast plants [such as] Amalanchier, Clethra and Itea — each a beautiful flowering plant with ornamental qualities — are deciduous, have spectacular fall foliage and support beneficial insect and bird populations. After they are established in about three years, they can be weaned off irrigation systems.

Repopulating with native plants instead of a foreign hybrid or other invasive plants — we call them garden thugs — is an environmentally conscious thing to do. An invasive plant like a barberry can become a monoculture that doesn't allow other plants to exist with it. Another invasive and prolific plant is burning bush, or winged euonymus.

How can homeowners make the most of outdoor space?

People are staying in their homes longer these days. Many of our homes have lost 10 to 30 percent of their value, so we're looking at new ways to enjoy staying in them. Instead of adding a room, why not create an outdoor room — unplug,

reconnect to nature and create your own little resort in your own backyard?

Choices range from intimate spaces for morning coffee to extensive outdoor entertaining areas. In the Northeast, outdoor lighting and heating systems, fire pits and fireplaces can extend the outdoor season. The hearth has always been a place for entertaining — and outdoors, the options are only limited by creativity and budget. You can start with the good old Weber grill, and move up to elaborate systems with sinks, refrigerators and keg dispensers. There is something very natural and romantic about hanging out under the stars.

Homeowners are also adding water features. What are some tips for doing this well?

The basic elements of nature — water, fire, air and sky — are all appealing, and water is a big part of that. The key to water features is low maintenance. We all know how difficult it was to keep goldfish as children. Tabletop or wall-mounted models that are plug and play work well. Just fill them with water, plug them in and you are good to go.

What other steps can make outdoor spaces low maintenance?

Simplify the plants and hardscape [structures incorporated into a landscape] wherever possible, and unify the terrace or patio. Choose native or water-wise plants. Most people don't want to deal with fussy topiary and



Photo: Rich Pomerantz

formal clipped boxwoods. Repeating what is working in the landscape, and eliminating plants that take a lot of work, helps. The idea is to create a tranquil environment and avoid a big to-do list.

Why are vegetable gardens more popular these days?

Michelle Obama's vegetable garden on one of the White House lawns made people think more about vegetable gardens. The organic produce movement has produced an awareness about where produce comes from, how it is raised and how it gets to the grocery store. The quickest and easiest way is to grow it yourself. The good news is that kids will eat more vegetables if they have a hand in growing them.

Many people are taking the grow-local movement seriously. It can be as simple as a small container for herbs in the kitchen window, or getting involved in local garden clubs and community gardens. Community gardening brings communities together, and it's a great way to grow what you need. ■