

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR ECOSCAPING IN WESTERN CANADA

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Landscapes that are attractive and easy to maintain can also be water-efficient. These convenient 'ecoscaped' yards appeal to homeowners who want a beautiful, environmental landscape at a reasonable price.

WHY TO BUILD AN ECOSCAPE

Water-efficient yards are becoming very popular because they are:

Convenient

Ecoscaped yards consist of minimal turf, low water-use plants, and taller grass, which reduce the need to mow, weed, and water.

Economical

Reduce your spending on fertilizer, water, and other maintenance costs.

Resistant

Ecoscaped yards are more resistant to pests, disease and drought than traditional yards, resulting in a healthier landscape that will have greater chances of surviving harsh conditions.

Functional

By replacing turf, plants and shrubs with decks and walkways, you increase usable surface area for entertainment and relaxation.

PREPARING FOR A NEW LANDSCAPE

Step 1: Draw a layout of your property

Draw in all permanent structures (i.e. house, garage, sidewalks, etc), established plants, and mature trees.

Step 2: Draw what you want to add

Attach tracing paper on top of the master layout, and sketch in the landscape features you want.

Step 3: Include details

After finalizing your design, add the specifics for each landscape feature (i.e. size, shape, material) to scale on the tracing paper. Decide exactly which plants will be used, and include their location in the diagram.

Step 4: Remove your old grass

The most practical way to remove your grass is through rototilling.

Step 5: Gather your topsoil

Existing topsoil (the soil on the surface) helps plants grow better than subsoil (soil underneath the topsoil) does. Gather the original topsoil to prevent damage whenever you landscape, and return it to the yard when you have finished.

Step 6: Loosen your soil

Plants cannot grow as easily when the soil is very compact. So, before planting, loosen soil to at least a 6-inch depth, and loosen the roots of new plants, shrubs and trees before planting. This is particularly important at new and renovated sites where heavy machinery may have compressed the soil.

DESIGNING WHILE KEEPING EFFICIENCY IN MIND

Whether you are designing a brand new yard, or just looking for ways to redesign your current yard, consider the following tips to simplify the process:

Native vegetation is the least thirsty

Ask if the specific grass, shrubs, or trees you are buying will thrive in your particular geographical area.



Potentilla

Add trees

Trees have deep roots that absorb water from deep underground, so they don't need much additional watering. They are also great wind blocks, which lessen water evaporation from soil.

Use water-saving ornamental grasses

Grass requires the most water in your yard. If you cannot replace it with a deck, patio, trees or walkways then choose grasses that require less water than the traditional Kentucky bluegrass. Consider ornamental perennial grasses such as blue fescue, which are drought tolerant and adapted to Western Canada's climate.

Think about the long run

Choose plants, shrubs and trees that, when fully grown, will require little water and will fit in with the landscape so that minimal pruning is required.

Separate plants based on water needs

Your yard layout should separate plants with different water requirements. This ensures that plants needing less water are no longer overwatered. Keep ‘thirstier’ plants closer to your home, as they will get fed from rainfall runoff from the roof.

Consider temperature differences

When deciding the layout of your plants, keep in mind that consistently sunny spots can be considerably hotter than shadier spots in the same yard. Keep only drought-resistant plants in the hotter ‘microclimates’ to limit evaporation.

Concentrate your grass areas

Try to avoid irregular or narrow shaped lawn areas when designing a yard because they are difficult to water efficiently.

Design with a flat landscape in mind

When you water plants that are on a slope, the water rolls down without adequate time to be fully absorbed into the soil. If you already have a slope, plant grass and plants that require little water, and use intermittent watering to allow time for water absorption.



Spirea

Add a rain barrel

These devices usually collect rainwater from downspouts connected to roof gutters. You can buy rain barrels or make your own out of recycled plastic containers.

Position all downspouts strategically

Any downspouts not feeding into rain barrels should be positioned so that rainwater is directed towards your lawn rather than your driveway. However, ensure that the spouts are placed far enough from your roofline to prevent seepage into your foundation.

Consider local bylaws

A building permit is required for certain types of deck structures. Some bylaws also restrict where trees, shrubs, fences or other structures can be located. You must provide a clean line of sight for motorists or pedestrians

approaching a street intersection or exiting from driveways, walkways or alleys onto the street.

Help is available

Talk to a local garden centre about how to design a water-efficient yard (i.e. ecoscaping, naturoscaping, xeriscaping, etc). They will be able to tell you more about conserving water in your yard and answer any questions you may have.

MAINTAINING YOUR ECOSCAPED YARD

Plants don't need steroids

Overfertilizing soil will make plants grow faster and bigger which increases their water requirements along with the amount of time you must spend mowing and pruning.

The pH phenomenon

You can get a simple and inexpensive pH test performed on your soil. It will indicate whether you need to change the pH to improve your plants' ability to absorb nutrients. Nutrients help your plants stay fit.

It's great to aerate

Using an aerator tool on your soil or lawn increases its access to air and it stores water better after watering.

Mulch

Add mulch to your soil to conserve water by reducing evaporation, lowering soil temperature, and controlling weeds which compete with other plants for water. Mulch should be no more than 7.5 cm thick to ensure circulation of air to soil.

- Organic mulches can include shredded leaves, wood chips, bark mulches, pine needles, hay, or small grass clippings. These materials should be watered after they are applied.
- Inorganic mulches can include rock, gravel, and marble, and should be avoided in hotter areas because they absorb heat.

Check all irrigation systems regularly for leaks

If certain portions of your lawn seem overgrown or especially green, you may have a leak. To prevent future damage, store hoses away from human or pet traffic.

Fine sprays are not fine for ecoscapes

Set your sprinklers or hoses to deliver water in large droplets, which are more resistant to evaporation. Manually water small gardens, plants and shrubs.

Manage sprinkler timers

Manual timers are often a better choice because they must be reset after each irrigation. Plus, they are often much cheaper than automatic timers. You can make automatic timers more efficient by resetting them regularly as rainfall changes.

Buy a rain gauge

One of the best irrigation tools is also one of the simplest: it's well worth a few dollars to invest in a quality rain gauge. Use it to measure the amount of rain collected per week, and subtract this amount from the 2.5 cm you would have applied to the lawn with sprinklers.

Water established plants less

Water your plants frequently for the first two years until they are established, after which their water requirements are minimal. The plants may need to be watered every second or third day during

their first month, especially if the weather is very hot or dry. They should be gradually weaned to being watered twice a week and then once a week.

Form a bowl around plants

Form a shallow depression around each plant to ensure the water penetrates down to the plant's roots rather than running off. Apply mulch over this depression to reduce surface evaporation.

Drip irrigation

Install a drip irrigation system. Drip irrigation uses narrow tubing to water plant roots directly. Drip irrigation emits water at the soil level where it can be efficiently used by the root system. Conventional sprinkler-type irrigation systems (either underground or by hose) should be used for lawns.

Don't water daily

Once lawns are established, they should get a deep watering of 2.5 cm (including rainfall) every 7 to 10 days to encourage deep rooting and make them more tolerant to drought, wear, cold and heat stress. To reduce runoff, water in 15-minute intervals until you have added the complete water allotment.

Water in the early morning

Water before 11 a.m. to limit evaporation caused by hot temperatures later in the day. Do not water in the evening because this can cause plant diseases to occur.

PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO YOUR WATER FEATURES

Water features such as decorative ponds, fountains and waterfalls look great in the yard, but they do consume extra water. Still, you can cut down on their water use by making just a few adjustments:

1. Regularly check for cracks and other damage in all pipes, pumps, and connections that can cause leaks.



2. Operate your lawn decorations for a limited number of hours per day, or better yet, only when your yard is actually in use. Use a simple timer to cut back on extraneous use.
3. Use lower pumping rates, smaller pumps, and pressure reducing valves to reduce water flow while maintaining the look of your water feature. The higher the water flow, the more water wasted due to evaporation.
4. Whenever it's windy or very hot, shut off your water features to avoid excessive evaporation.
5. Use a cover to prevent evaporation from your pool or hot tub. The less water you need to replace, the more you conserve. Covers also keep debris out and heat in.
6. Adjust the direction, pressure, flow rate, and water level to prevent splashing (which wastes water) and spraying water too high into the air (which speeds up evaporation).

THE BEST DROUGHT TOLERANT PLANTS

The following plants are not only drought tolerant, they also look great in your Western Canada garden.

Perennials

Baby's Breath	Foxtail Lily	Snow-in-Summer
Blanketflower	Gasplant	Soapwort
Blue Fescue	Globe Thistle	Spurge
Blue Sage	Hens & Chicks	St. John's Wort
Coneflower	Ornamental Onion	Stonecrop
Cornflower	Potentilla	Wild Indigo
Daylily	Russian Sage	Wormwood
Evening Primrose	Silver Sage	Yarrow
Fleeceflower	Sea Holly	Yucca



Coneflower

Bedding Plants

African Daisy	Nierembergia
Clarkia	Poppy (especially California Poppy)
Cosmos	Portulaca
Gazania	Salvia farinacea
Gomphrena	Salvia horminum (but not Salvia splendens)
Ice Plant	Scaevola
Lotus Vine	

Trees & Shrubs

Amur Maackia	Juniper
Buffaloberry	Pine
Caragana	Potentilla
Cherry Prinsepia	Russian Olive
Golden Flowering Currant	Salt Bush
Genista	Sea Buckthorn
Hackberry	Sumac
Dwarf Bush Honeysuckle	Tamarisk



Lily

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