

A Recap of the Reasons for Landscaping for Water Quality from last week's ECO Time Article:

- To Protect Water Quality
- To Capture Rainwater
- To Reduce Flooding
- To Ease Soil Erosion
- To Increase Infiltration and Reduce Pollution through Buffer Strips
- To Provide Wildlife Habitat
- To Enhance Property Values

Before you start your Design:

The first step is to evaluate your property based on the categories below. Understanding the different components will simplify the process when choosing your plants. Make a sketch of your property to guide your decisions and to show your landscape designer (if you choose to use one).

Suitable Areas to Consider

Do you have an eroding bank? A washout area? A low area in which water pools after a storm? A gently sloping yard that dumps all of the rain water right into the storm drain? An area that is too dry? Is your property on a lake, stream or wetland where the lawn is mowed to the edge? Are beneficial shade trees present? Do you want to redirect rainwater to a specific spot? Do you want to change the topography? (add a berm?) Keep your chosen area in mind and set a goal that you want to achieve.

Existing Plants

Is the area turf grass? Are there existing perennials or trees that you wish to utilize? Are there existing plants or trees that you wish to remove? Complete an inventory and a sketch drawing.

Sun Exposure

You need to take note of where the landscape is exposed to sun and for how much of the day. Buildings and existing trees may provide shade for part of the day. Keep in mind that the standard for plants requiring full sun is a minimum of 6 hours per day.

Soil Conditions

Plants have preferences to certain soils based on the soil's attributes. These attributes include soil moisture, soil pH, soil type, and soil nutrient availability. Some plants prefer steady moisture, while others are drought tolerant. Knowing if your area is moist or dry is important before choosing your plants. Soils can be alkaline, neutral or acidic. Knowing your soil's pH will help you choose the appropriate plants. You can pick up a pH testing kit at your local home improvement store or nursery. Soils are made up of three components-sand, silt, and clay. Combinations of these components are referred to as a loam. You may hear them referred to as a clay-loam; this is a combination of the three components, with clay dominating the mix. A sandy-loam would have sand as the dominant component. Many plants have adapted to these different soil types. When planting in a sandy, or clay loam, seek out plants that prefer these areas. Regular use of fertilizers is common for those of us who want a beautiful lawn and garden. This practice is usually not necessary and can be harmful from a water quality point of view. Before adding fertilizers, try testing your soil for the nutrients that fertilizers offer: nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium, listed as the N: P: K ratio on your fertilizer bag. What if the plants I choose don't fit with my soil conditions? You can either replace your choices with appropriate plants or you can amend your soil.

Plant Hardiness Zone

When planning your garden you need to take planting zones and frost dates into consideration. "Plant Hardiness Zones" divide the United States into 11 planting zones based on a 10 degree Fahrenheit difference in the average annual minimum temperatures. There are also different climates and frost dates within planting zones in a region due to the topography, lakes and rivers, gully or hills. These can cause altered airflow, which can raise or lower the temperature, changing the zone in your area. The chemical balance and texture of

the soil, exposure, altitude, rainfall, humidity, sun light levels, wind, and wind chill factors can also alter the effects of plant hardiness zones. (USDA).

Water is an important resource for our health, economy, and ecosystem. Landscaping practices can impact the quality of our water systems. We need to landscape with an eye for water quality. Installing landscaping that doesn't require fertilizing, watering or mowing. Landscaping for water quality is a method that invites nature back into our lives and yards.