

CHOOSING THE RIGHT PLANTS FOR THE RIGHT PLACE

A GUIDE TO EFFICIENT PLANT SELECTION & LANDSCAPE DESIGN

Whether you have a new garden that's in need of a few small adjustments, or you have a mature area that needs a bigger facelift, now is a perfect time to plan for improvements to transition to a healthier landscape. A few small changes might even help you save on your water bill while creating an oasis that people and pollinators can enjoy season after season.

DESIGN

The Landscape Design Rule of Thirds

This design principal serves as a guideline for creating an aesthetically balanced and water-efficient outdoor space.

1/3 Lawn



Lawns are usually the most dominant feature in urban and suburban residential landscapes. While lawns can create usable spaces for children, pets and entertaining, they also tend to require the most maintenance. Turfgrass typically requires significantly more water than mulched landscape beds with native plants. That's one reason we recommend limiting your turfgrass areas to about a third of your total landscape footprint.

1/3 Native Plants

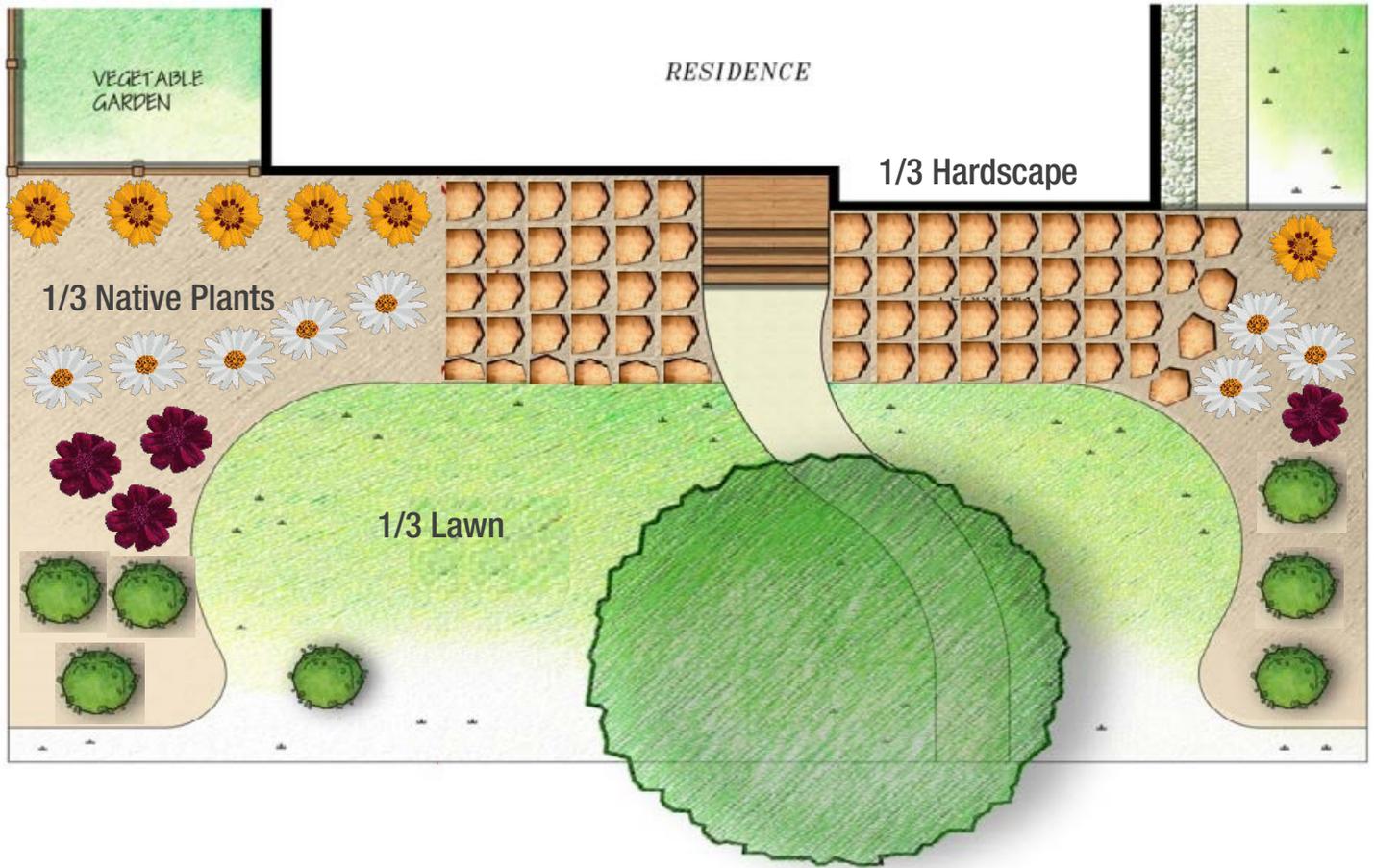


Trees, shrubs, and perennial flowers are some of our landscape's most valuable assets, adding color, texture, and form. Plants make up the brushstrokes of an artful landscape design no matter your style. When native plants are incorporated into a larger area, paired with efficient irrigation and a 2"-4" layer of mulch, they are significantly lower maintenance and require very little supplemental water when compared to turfgrass areas. Focus on native plants that are included on regional plant lists, like the one attached to this guide. Make sure any plantings are adapted to your hardiness zone, soil type and rainfall patterns. Once these plants are established, you will enjoy a lush, vibrant landscape season after season, and you'll help conserve a precious natural resource in the process!

1/3 Hardscape



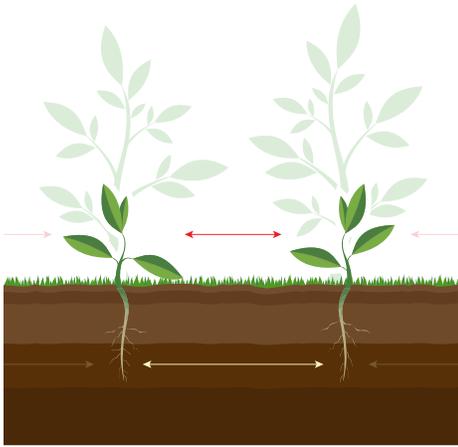
When reducing turfgrass areas, you might consider how your landscape flows holistically. Generally, the hardscape refers to all the components of a garden that aren't plants. Are your pathways functional and intentional? Do you have useable outdoor "rooms" that extend your living spaces outdoors? Are there spaces for relaxing and entertaining? Consider dedicating around 1/3 of your landscape to creating or extending these hardscaped areas. Pathways, patios, fire pits and dry riverbeds made of pervious materials, like flagstone, pavers, decomposed granite or Tejas gravel, are useful from a design perspective—PLUS, they can also help you conserve water. Unlike impervious concrete, they allow moisture to infiltrate the soil in between the cracks and crevices where it can be utilized by nearby plants. They also don't require water to maintain!



BENEFITS OF NATIVE PLANTS

Typically require less:	Native Plants are generally better adapted to:
Water	Native soils
Fertilizers or pesticides	Irregular rainfall patterns
Maintenance	Extreme temperatures
They also provide:	
Variety of colors, forms and textures	
Habitat for beneficial butterflies, birds and other native wildlife	
Inviting outdoor spaces that are environmentally friendly	

Spacing and Placement



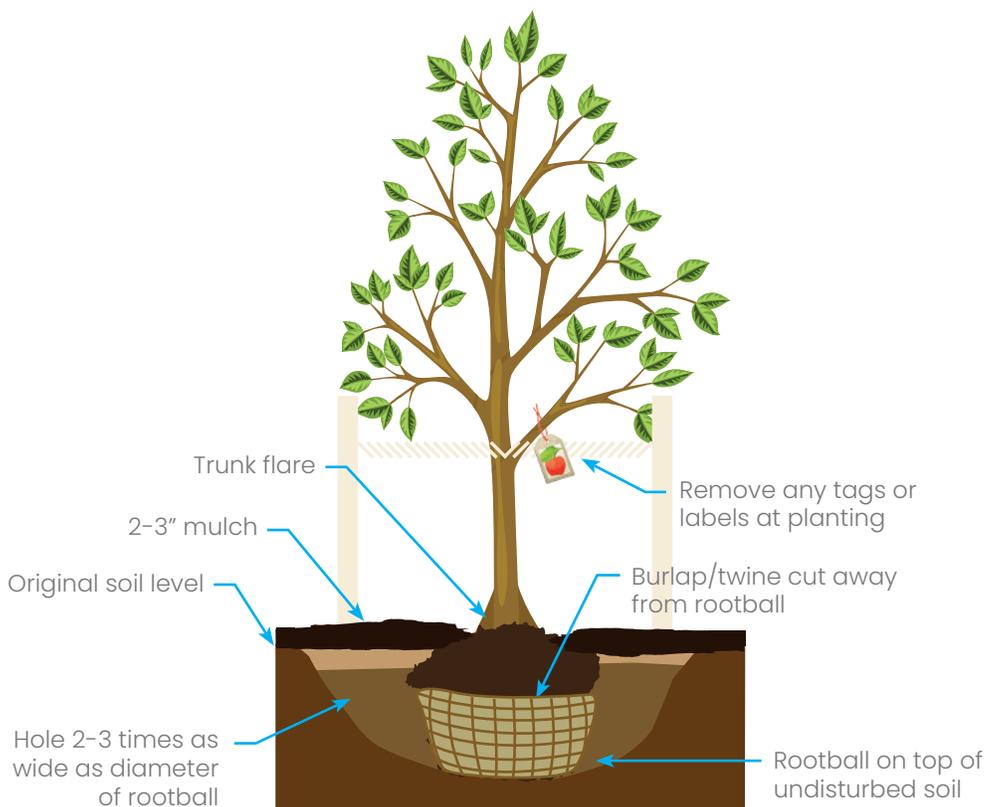
Putting the right plant in the right spot will ensure the best success of that perennial flower, shrub or tree over the life of the plant. It can also help you avoid costly maintenance issues associated with planting too closely together. Oftentimes, overcrowded plants are stressed and compete for sunlight, nutrients and water. Trees and shrubs planted too close to structures can also lead to long-term headaches.

When purchasing a plant, read your plant's tag and pay special attention to its hardiness zone (North Texas is in Zone 8a), light requirements, size and spacing. Note the full, mature growth of the plant when spacing new plants to avoid overcrowding. Pay special attention to sunlight obstructions like trees, buildings, fences or even other plants in your landscape. It's also important to consider how shade conditions change over time, with mature plants casting a larger shadow as they grow. This is especially critical when planting near or under trees. The orientation of the sun, based on the season, can also affect which plant thrives in a certain area.

Proper Planting

When planting, it is key to make the transition from the nursery to your landscape as easy as possible on the plant. Before planting can begin, your soil may need to be prepared or amended for success. Consider incorporating up to 3" of compost into the top 6" of soil to improve drainage, boost water holding capacity, and increase nutrient availability. See the [Landscape Basics- Guide to Gardening in North Texas](#) for more information on soil improvements.

Whether you're planting a perennial flower, shrub or tree, the width of the hole should be 2 to 3 times as wide as the root mass growing in its container. The depth of the planting hole should be no deeper than the root ball. In fact, it's better to plant in a slightly shallower hole to allow for settling of soil, and to avoid covering the root flare of the plant. Contrary to popular belief, you should avoid breaking or unnecessarily disturbing a healthy root system. If roots are pot-bound, growing out of the container or perhaps circling the inside of the container, they should be removed with a pair of sharp pruners. This will prevent the roots from continuing to grow in a mass, girdling the plant.



When planting, avoid placing excess mulch or soil around the root flare and base of the plant.

Ensure proper spacing to prevent nearby plants from competing for sunlight, water or nutrients and to provide adequate air flow.

Hydro-Zoning

Grouping plants with similar water needs

Not all plants require the same amount of water. Placing plants with like water needs together is called hydro-zoning. Native, drought-tolerant plants typically require significantly less water than turfgrass lawns. Likewise, perennial flower beds typically require less water than your edible gardens or turfgrass. When designing your home landscape or when scheduling your water needs, take these factors into consideration. By hydro-zoning your landscape, you can be as efficient as possible with your water use and also give your plants the best chance to thrive. This also allows for each zone to be better tailored to its specific water needs and the time it takes to deliver adequate moisture.

Pitfalls to Avoid

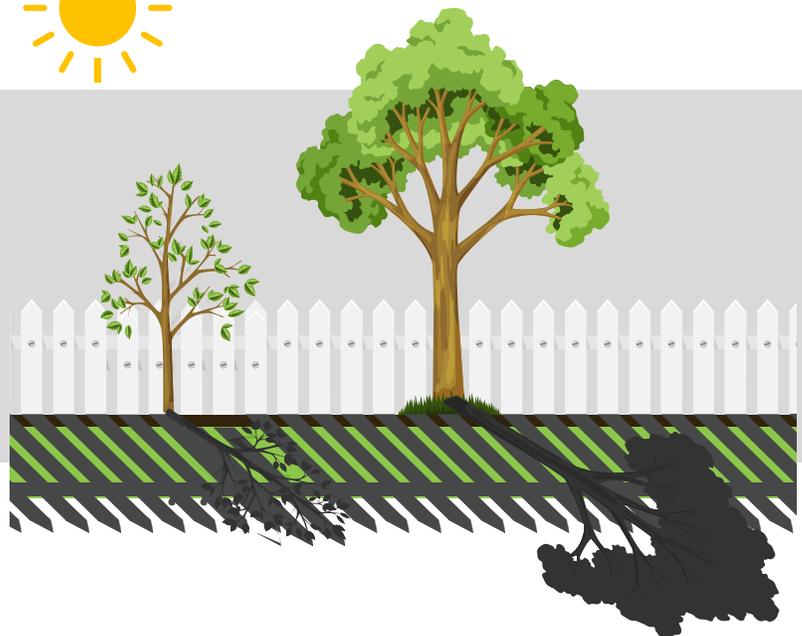
Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for landscapes to be over-watered, over-fertilized or over-applied with pesticides. These practices can be harmful to your landscape, our water resources, and the beneficial wildlife that call our community home. Setting up your landscape for success with the tips in this guide will result in less long-term care and maintenance.

Understanding Sunlight

The orientation of your home and landscape in relation to the sun is particularly important. In most cases, the west side of the home will receive the blunt of the blistering afternoon sun during the hottest part of the day, while the east side of the home will likely receive less intense morning sunlight. The southern orientation usually receives more sunlight for the greater part of the year, with the north-facing landscapes often receiving more shade-- as the sun may be blocked by buildings, fences or trees.



It is important to note that the amount and quality of light on your property can change over time, especially in landscapes with maturing trees and shrubs, or with the addition of new buildings and fences.



While sun-loving plants might grow successfully in shady areas for a while, they may decline over time, becoming thinner and less dense. Sun-loving flowering plants might even stop blooming as the shade begins to encroach on areas that have typically received greater amounts of sunlight. It is tempting for many to respond to excess shade by over-watering and/or over-fertilizing plants that are better adapted to more sunlight. These poor management practices can be detrimental to your landscape and the environment, leading to unnecessary pest or disease issues and pollutants running off the landscape. Instead, adapt your planting areas with the changing sunlight as shade trees mature. For example, instead of resodding the turfgrass under the tree, convert the area into a mulched landscape bed with shade loving plants.

Watering



In addition to finding the right sunlight conditions on your property, having access to water is equally critical-- especially during the establishment phase for your plants. When choosing the right location for your plants and BEFORE you actually plant, make sure your landscape has some sort of water supply nearby. This could simply be a faucet-connected hose, a soaker hose or, better yet, drip irrigation installed for increased water efficiency. For more about how much to water, check out our [“Wise Watering”](#) guide.

Sunny areas of the landscape will likely require more water than the shady ones. A sprinkler zone on the hotter west or southwest side of your home might require slightly longer run times, while a zone entirely in the shade might need significantly less, due to slower evaporation rates. A soil moisture meter is an effective and inexpensive tool to help determine if areas need more water.

MAINTENANCE

Weeding

During establishment, some weeds might pop up from time to time. Weeds have the potential to compete with your young plants for water, sunlight and nutrients. The easiest and most effective way to control unwanted plants in your landscape is through mechanical control (hand pulling or using weeding tools). Pulling weeds with a constant yet firm movement when the soil is damp doesn't require a lot of effort and will (in most cases) control small weed infestations before they spread or set seed. This method also reduces any potential negative impacts on your pollinator community.

If weeds begin to encroach rapidly or if you do not feel like you can easily control by hand pulling or hoeing, herbicide options might be considered. Whether using organic or synthetic herbicides, it is very important to always apply per label instructions. Especially avoid spraying on nearby landscape plant material and pollinators. Be sure to check the weather and do not apply herbicides before rain or sprinkler events.



Pest Control

Integrated Pest Management (or IPM) takes a holistic approach to the management of weeds, problem insects, and diseases with the least possible hazard to people, property, and the environment.

IPM uses a series of pest management evaluations, decisions, and controls with a more environmentally friendly approach. Not all weeds, disease issues or insect species require control. In fact, most insects are either beneficial or benign. IPM programs work to monitor for pests and identify them accurately, so that the best control decisions can be used. This multifaceted approach to monitoring and identifying pests reduces the possibility of using pesticides in a harmful manner.

The following IPM guidelines should be followed when gardening for and around native pollinators:

- Correctly identify weeds, pest insects or disease symptoms before you begin treatment.
- Use both organic and synthetic pesticides sparingly, and only treat areas where pests (weeds, insects, diseases) are problems.
- Always follow label recommendations to ensure correct application rates, timing and use.
- Whenever possible, choose pesticides that won't persist in the environment. (Read labels and conduct research before purchasing)
- Time applications so that you are not spraying when pollinators are active and avoid spraying during bloom time. While most bees are active during the day and return to the hive after sunset, other pollinators remain active through the night.
- It's best to avoid spraying pesticides (organic and synthetic) around healthy beneficial insect populations and areas with a lot of blooming, nectar-producing plants.

Pruning

Depending on the severity of the winter, some evergreen native plants will stay green throughout the winter months. Semi-evergreen plants may show little winter dieback, depending on the micro-climate in which they are planted. Other plants can be described as deciduous perennials, meaning they will go dormant or may dieback all the way to the ground during cooler months. Don't worry! Most native plants are well-adapted to withstand our normal freezing temperatures and will vigorously re-sprout from either last year's branches or regrow from the ground each year. These plants are aided by the removal of last year's growth, which encourages and helps rejuvenate the plant for the next growing season.

The best time to prune landscape plants is generally from mid-February to mid-March, when temperatures are still cool, and your plant material is just starting to push new growth and showing signs of spring. When pruning, a good rule of thumb is to cut back the dead plant material first and add it to your compost pile.

Using a pair of clean, sharp hand pruners, gardening shears or loppers, start at the top of any plant showing brown, dried tissue. Begin cutting back until you see green leaves or green tissue in the stems in the area right underneath the bark. When you begin to see any green tissue, you can stop pruning for function and then make a few moderate cuts (as needed) to shape the plant for the aesthetic look that you prefer.

When pruning diseased plant material, special care should be given to clean pruners (with a vinegar or bleach solution) in between cuts and in between plants to avoid spreading disease to other plants. Diseased tissue should be discarded into the trash.

Avoid over-pruning which can cause damage to the plant. Never prune back more than 1/3 of a plant that is actively growing. For plants that have died back all the way to the ground, leave 2"-4" of last year's growth at the base of the plant as a buffer.



Deadheading

Some flowers have the potential to produce more blooms if the older, spent flowers are removed. This maintenance step is certainly not critical but can be practiced as needed. Leaving the spent flowers also has its benefits, as well; providing seeds to share and a potential food source for native songbirds. Deadheading may also be helpful to control the spread of aggressively reseeding plants.



Fertilizer

Although regionally native plants are well-adapted to the soils of North Texas, after establishment, they may need more nutrients than compost alone can provide. A soil test is the best way to assess nutrient availability in your garden. Soil tests can be conducted using local and regional soil labs, or at home kits. Consider taking a soil sample every 2-3 years to assess any nutrient deficiencies on your specific site. The analysis can be used to gauge the need for and amounts of appropriate fertilizers based on your landscape management preferences. The three numbers on a bag of fertilizer refer to the ratio of nitrogen (N), phosphorous (P), and potassium (K), the macronutrients most critical to plant growth.

Whether applying organic or synthetic fertilizers, always apply per the recommendations on the label for best results. Over applying fertilizers can lead to plant stress and can runoff the landscape, polluting local water bodies.



N-P-K



Mulching

As the mulch in your garden breaks down, it adds organic matter to the soil by composting in place. This aids not only in moisture-holding capacity, but also improves soil structure and the ability of rainfall and irrigation water to infiltrate deeply and easily into the soil. However, it does mean that you will need to periodically top-dress with another layer of mulch to maintain that 2"-4" layer. Consider adding ½" of your favorite mulch every year in spring, or perhaps, an inch every two years as needed. Take care and avoid placing excess mulch around the root flare and base of the plant. Mulch rings that look more like a volcano in shape can contribute to increased chances of pest and disease problems.

Incorrect



Correct



PLANT SELECTION



A number of native plants, and their cultivars, are regionally adapted to North Central Texas soils and climate. These plants offer high ornamental value in home landscapes. Whether you're looking for the right tree, shrub, perennial, succulent, vine, or groundcover, a plant indigenous to Texas might be the perfect fit. They offer a diverse selection of colors, textures and forms from which to choose. You can find a native plant to thrive in a variety of sunlight conditions, large or tight spaces, and those that are just the right plant for the right place in your landscape. Look for the asterisks to find our favorites for people and pollinators.

<p>Trees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Live Oak Monterrey Oak Chinkapin Oak Bur Oak Cedar Elm Arizona Cypress Mexican Plum *Redbud *Desert Willow American Smoketree Eve's Necklace Magnolia *Goldenball Leadtree 	<p>Woody Perennials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Autumn sage Flame Acanthus American Beautyberry *Texas Rock Rose *'Henry Duelberg' Sage Wooly Butterfly Bush 	<p>Shrubs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oakleaf Hydrangea (North American Native) Dwarf Yaupon Holly Possumhaw holly Dwarf Wax Myrtle 'White Cloud' Texas Sage *'Green Cloud' Texas Sage *Compact Cherry Laurel Dwarf Palmetto *Texas Mountain Laurel 'Gro-Low' Fragrant Sumac
<p>Grasses/Grasslike</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *'Blonde Ambition' Blue Grama Mexican Feather Grass Gulf Muhly 'White Cloud' Muhly Inland Sea Oats Little Bluestem 'Dallas Blues' Switchgrass Lindheimer Muhly Texas Sedge 	<p>Herbaceous Perennials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Black-Eyed Susan Blackfoot Daisy *Wild Bergamot *Gregg's Mist Flower Scarlet Sage 'Texas Gold' Columbine Coreopsis Southern Wood Fern White Mistflower Hardy Hibiscus Gaura Skullcap Cedar Sage Fall Aster *Texas Lantana *Turk's Cap 	<p>Cacti & Succulents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Color Guard' Yucca 'Bright Edge Yucca Soft Leaf Yucca *'Brakelights' Red Yucca *'Sandia Glow' Yucca *'Desert Dusk' Yucca Parry's Agave Purple Prickly Pear
<p>Groundovers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Frog Fruit Snake Herb Horse Herb 		<p>Vines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Cross Vine *Coral Honeysuckle *Passionvine Carolina Jessamine Evergreen Wisteria

For a searchable database of regional plants adapted to our region visit [TXSmartScape.com](https://www.txsmartscape.com). Click the "Native to Texas" option to explore native plants.

Water Is Awesome is a public outreach campaign promoting the efficient use and value of water in North Central Texas. Sponsors are City of Dallas Water Utilities, North Texas Municipal Water District and Tarrant Regional Water District. This publication was written and developed by Rooted In, LLC