

Low Care Landscapes: Lowest care, highest appeal

Look for simple but don't sacrifice looks. Catch the eye without denting the budget

I. It's in the design of a new area and evaluation of existing area

A. Inherent value: Appeal to people by knowing what they want

1. As many reasons as people who'll use the landscape
2. Verbalizing the reason keeps cost-holding / cost-cutting on track

B. Be realistic about budget

1. Count not just money, but time
 - \$2 - 30 per square foot
 - 200 square feet, 16 hours' work (prep, purchase, plant)
2. What deadlines are there? How much patience?
 - Time can save money, net a healthier garden. Money can't always buy time.
 - Can it be ready and pretty in time for the celebration?

C. The caretaker: At least as important as design aesthetics

1. Maintenance makes or breaks a garden
 - No more than can be cared for. Phase in new beds, re-size existing.
 - Knowledge, ability level *and* willingness influence what you "can" do.
 - Dollar cost and time track closely. From most to least costly in minutes / month / 100 sq. ft.:
perennials (60), annuals (18), shrubs, groundcover, and trees (10), lawn (8)
2. Details make a good garden great
 - Can the mower mow and the pruner, prune?
 - Know how far a caretaker can comfortably reach

D. Critical to success: A match between site and design elements

1. Know about the site for low plant replacement and pest control expense
 - How much sun: 6+ hours sun per day = "full sun"; 2-4 = shade
 - Soil texture, condition, drainage.
 - Water availability and retention
 - Exposure to other plants, animals, and human activities/installations
2. Don't fight nature by thinking light, soil or water will change significantly

E. Planning what to use there: The very best plant and feature list

1. Begin with a good source: Model site, plant encyclopedia, expert
 - Don't rely on pictures, or catalogs. Use non-commercial, with site info
 - Choose only from things that match the site
2. Ten well chosen elements is plenty for new work or renovation

F. About focal points: Money well spent or wasted

1. Look from where viewers will stand or sit to look at this area:
 - Design for the main viewer's place, angle, motion (speed)
 - Adjust afterward for secondary view / viewers
 - Tall, bright things are always & not the only possible focal point features.
Singularity and contrast are key

2. Focal points: Invest where you *want* to draw attention.
 - Don't let any eyesore turn your head
 - Recognize frames. Frame only what deserves attention.
3. Adopt a theme or pattern, stick with it. Classics often best.
 - Formal, informal
 - Not overdone: Frame plus one matte, maybe two.
 - Uncluttered. Too many focal points = busy. Give it the "turn head" test.

G. Advantages of a scale drawing, including a standard plot plan

Buying only what you need!

H. Outlining the designed area: Draw a simple line

1. Encompass the focal points
2. Suit the caretaker: If you can walk the line, you can mow it
3. Without letting included bare space make you nervous

L. Adjust before planting, and at beginning or *end* of season

1. Check the:
 - Bloom season
 - Accessibility
 - Balance
 - View from secondary viewpoints
2. Change it while it's easy:
 - Nudge plants aside for maintenance paths
 - Smooth out awkward and unnecessary curves

II. Low care/High appeal is in your choices, and recognition of trends

A. Non-plant features in tandem with plants: Lower care, longer interest

1. Containers, totems, sculpture, whimsy
2. It's a 52-24-7 world
 - Earlier bloom, color
 - Fall color: Predictable, plannable, celebration of our region
 - Winter interest. Increasingly sophisticated appreciation of form and texture

B. Flowering plants, where "new" is not always easiest or cost-cutting

1. Annuals: Massed as workhorses, stick with the Top Ten.
2. Perennials (remembering many are groundcover and pseudo-shrubs)
 - New may be worthwhile if the improvement is resistance to problems

C. "New American Garden"

1. Massed planting
2. Whole-plant appreciation
3. Naturalizers and natives

D. Added value: Wildlife, heritage, folklore

III. Low care in a practical approach to planning and maintenance

A. Planting costs

\$250 - \$1,200 / 100 square feet

B. Maintenance cost, scheduling

\$1 per square foot of *garden*, less than 50¢ for lawn/shrub/groundcover areas
Beyond mowing: Every 2 weeks May-April, every 3 weeks rest of year except
August break

C. Simplifying techniques

1. Better "bones"
2. Wider paths
3. Fewer edges
4. Seriously-raised beds
5. Better knowledge and acceptance of site, plant match, soil reality
 - Right plant, right place or no plant, no place
 - Plants grouped by water needs
6. More recognition of plant nature
 - Stay-put plants
 - Naturalizers given their head: More masses of what works
7. More shrub and groundcover areas
8. Highest maintenance closest at hand
9. Planting smarter: Smaller starts, shorter trials
10. Clever caretaker:
 - Start earlier in spring
 - Weed more thoroughly in *fall*
 - Mulch in fall, veneer mulches
 - Study in winter
 - Plant for higher contrast: Easier to see weeds!
 - Few but good tools
 - Power where physical ability's lacking, not to "save time"
 - Walk around to start the job
 - Cut more, harder