



lawn and garden choices for a more natural environment

There is an increasing trend in residential landscaping to move away from

manicured lawns and groomed gardens, and toward more unstructured yards that use plants that are indigenous to the area. Part of the reason for the move in this direction is that various levels of governments are beginning to see long-term cost and health benefits, and are therefore encouraging the change. The trend, often called "natural landscaping", is catching on in home gardening as well because of a combination of environmental, cost-saving, and convenience benefits.

What is Natural Landscaping?

Natural landscaping is the modification of land using native plants to meet human objectives with minimal detrimental effects to the environment. It is sometimes referred to as 'native landscaping', 'beneficial landscaping', or 'gardening for life'. It's worth understanding that our culture of green lawns and structured gardens has been largely inherited from European landscapes where the moist climates are ideal for maintaining healthy short grasses. But by and large, in North America, this type of greenery is not naturally maintained, because our continent has such a diverse climate range. Yet we spend a king's ransom to mimic estates found in England and Western Europe!

The Benefits of Natural Landscaping

Think of how much time, energy, equipment, expense and effort is put into the care and maintenance of a typical lawn or cultivated garden. Converting a sizeable portion of a property to a natural growth area could result in considerable benefits:

- ❖ Economical (minimal start-up and maintenance costs)
- ❖ Ecological (abandoning use of pesticides, herbicides, power equipment, etc.)
- ❖ Social (neighborhood cooperation, reduced use of water, etc.)
- ❖ Personal (healthy, convenient, and aesthetically pleasing)

Natural Choices Cover a Lot of Ground!

Many homeowners who are not familiar with the idea of a natural garden or landscape imagine unencumbered growth of unwanted weeds, wild vegetation and unsightly properties. This is actually an exaggerated, if not false, impression. True, you could leave your entire yard fallow and eventually it would be covered with wild-looking vegetation. But, that method isn't truly "natural" because half of the growth would come from seeds of nearby gardens, many of which were originally cultivated in greenhouses or imported as hybrid species. Instead, the natural garden area should be managed and maintained, and its size and density controlled by selectively "weeding" certain unwanted plants and encouraging others, like wildflowers to flourish.

Community and Environmental Payoff

Natural landscaping is beginning to make a lot of sense to governments, corporations – even some golf courses – due to the cost and health benefits of reduced labor for maintenance and the discontinuation of chemical treatments. By considering natural choices for our private and public spaces, we are practicing good stewardship of our community, large and small. Natural, aesthetically-pleasing surroundings have a side benefit that could have a very positive long-term effect on our neighborhood and the environment.