

GARDENS YOU ASKED FOR: Low Water Wonders

2011
COUNTRY
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NO. 139

BACKYARD SOLUTIONS

DREAM BACKYARDS FROM PROBLEM SPACES

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spaces

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dry areas • paths • slopes • sideyards





Two urns with flowering annuals flank a bench; lilacs behind provide shade and privacy from the driveway.

a sense of stability

A walkway bursting with visual interest guides a family and its friends right to the front door

Problems: Home sat on the top of a steep hill; in addition, it lacked a proper entryway to guide visitors to the front door.

Solutions: A guided landscaped walkway that brings people directly to the home's entrance, with a separate parking area on the side of the house.

Key plantings:

Tradescantia 'Sweet Kate' (Sweet Kate Spiderwort); *Acer palmatum* var. *dissectum* 'Crimson Queen' (Crimson Queen Japanese Maple); *Rhododendron* 'Rosy Lights' (Rosy Lights Azalea); *Sedum kamtschaticum* (Kamtschaticum Sedum); *Phlox subulata* 'Emerald Pink' (Pink Creeping Phlox).

Zones: 5-6

Landscape architect:

Brian Cossari, ASLA, Hoffman Landscapes, 647 Danbury Road, Wilton, CT 06897, 203-834-9656, hoffmanlandscapes.com

The front yard of a couple's Connecticut property offered some challenges: a steep slope down to the road and an absence of an attractive, functional approach to the front door. Hoffman Landscapes' landscape architect Brian Cossari developed a plan that features a meandering front walkway for a more pleasing journey to the front entrance. Curves make the entry path more inviting. Cossari also made the walk wide enough for two people, constructed it from durable precast concrete pavers laid in a random pattern and bordered in a row of pavers for a more formal touch. To define the direction, add an air of stability and protect elements due to the yard's steep grade, he introduced a row of rounded boxwoods on the outer edge of the walk and a thin-stacked fieldstone retaining wall with a bluestone top across from the front door. The boxwoods grow slowly and will be kept to under 30" high; they don't require much maintenance and are deer-proof. "In addition, they provide structure without obscuring views," Cossari says. For more visual interest, he planted layers of flowering shrubs and perennials. A bench at the end of the path near the driveway offers a focal point and a resting spot to wait for children to return home.

details to plan an eye-catching entrance

"The best way for homeowners to create a grand entrance to welcome family and friends is to imagine how they will see the property at first glance," says landscape architect Brian Cossari. "Drive up as if you're a guest; park where your guests would park; walk to the house; and then decide what's good about what you have and what needs to be done."

• **Contact a professional** "For bigger jobs where construction and hardscape are involved, get a landscape expert's opinion," Cossari says.

• **Develop a budget** "Most homeowners neglect to set aside enough money for landscaping and also forget to include a portion for lighting," says Cossari.

LANDSCAPE LIGHTING

By Susan Mary Dowd

Draw attention to your yard's best features

A skillfully lit landscape not only enables you to spend many more precious hours outdoors enjoying what you've created, but it also transforms the view from inside your home.



PHOTO: ©istockphoto.com/Ross Chandler

WELCOME, FRIENDS

Path lighting guides visitors to your front door, so select a style that complements your home.

MANY HOMEOWNERS spend enormous amounts of time and expense on landscaping and outdoor living areas. Yet, when the sun goes down, these spaces all but cease to exist in any practical sense.

Matthew Biron, landscape designer for Hoffman Landscapes in Wilton, Connecticut, explains: "At night, looking out a window is like looking at a black mirror. Your range of vision ends there. Landscape lighting allows you to see beyond and enjoy the view even when it's dark out. In effect, it visually extends the interior rooms of the home to the outside."

**EXTEND YOUR
LIVING SPACE**

Dramatic effects

The light of day tends to flatten out architectural details and plantings. Landscape lighting radically alters that, pulling details forward and giving your yard even more character.

Enhances security

Sconces, a motion sensor light and maybe a string of pathlights will ensure safe footing and act as an added security measure. But where outdoor lighting really shines is in its ability to completely transform a property.



4 types of lighting

When it comes to the different types of landscape illumination, there is a basic vocabulary that it is helpful to know:

1. **Path lighting**, primarily a safety measure but also used to dramatize certain landscape features, is installed directly into the ground or in walls along walkways.
2. **Downlighting** is installed within trees or on pergola roofs, and is used to illuminate living or entertaining areas.
3. **Moonlighting**—also used in trees—simulates the effect of a full moon. It creates foliage shadows on the ground that dance with the breeze, breathing visual life to an otherwise static nightscape.
4. **Uplighting** dramatizes a home's architecture and creates stunning effects with trees and plantings.

SHINE ON!

Don't be shy: Use a variety of lighting options to highlight your yard's best assets. PHOTO: Hoffman Landscapes, Inc.



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BLOOMIN' BEAUTIES

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LIGHTING THAT PAYS OFF

A combo of uplighting and downlighting is the best way to do justice to accent pieces in your garden, like sculpture or statues. Remember, a skillfully lit landscape will allow you to spend many more hours outdoors, so be sure to light up those parts of the yard you especially love looking at.

Lighting your landscape is probably best left to professionals, but chances are you won't need to call in both an electrician and a landscaper, since many landscaping firms offer electrical services as well.

The bottom line

Lighting is an investment that will pay off down the road. "Landscape lighting is a good selling feature," says Biron. "Especially if potential buyers drive by at night to check out the house. We also recommend giving your real estate salesperson photos of the night view to use in listing the property. It's probably the least expensive way to make your home stand out from the other homes that are for sale in your area."

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Caring for Trees & Shrubs

Get long-term results from your yard's hardest workers

By Barbara Ballinger

Proper tree and shrub care isn't just about good looks. Healthy specimens can add value to your property, particularly when you go to sell. They can also improve air quality and harbor wildlife, according to the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA). Conversely, poorly maintained trees may not just distract visually from the yard, but they can cause concern to buyers, who may jump to the conclusion that if you haven't cared for your trees and bushes, you might not have cared for your house.

But where to start?

If you've just moved in or ignored your trees and bushes for a few years, a prudent beginning is to hire an arborist who has been certified by the ISA or a similar organization, such as the American Society of Consulting Arborists (ASCA) and the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA). Here, Luana Vargas, ISA's educational development manager and a certified arborist offers advice to getting started:

Overall assessment

An arborist can perform an assessment on one tree or bush, or on the entire site, checking for healthfulness by spotting abnormalities in foliage, problems with branches or limbs, or trunks with damage. "What they're looking for is anything that's not normal for that specific species," Vargas says. Arborists might also be asked to assess the trees' and bushes' location—if they're in too much shade or sun for their type and the climate.

• Planting

Arborists also will suggest what trees to plant for your yard's amount of sun, shade, wind, space and soil. Southern magnolias, a favorite in the South, won't fare well, for example, in Vargas's colder Chicago-area climate. Another consideration should be how tall and wide the tree or bush will get once it is fully grown.

For optimal plant care, call in a certified arborist to evaluate your yard. You just may be surprised by what you'll learn!

Photo: Hoffman Landscapes, Inc.



Basic care

Proper pruning will keep a plant healthy. In addition, you can use the technique to alter a shrub or tree's shape, or to keep a grouping to a uniform size.

• Pruning

An arborist will determine the type of pruning to maintain or improve a tree or shrub's health, appearance and safety. Some limbs may interfere with wires, gutters or windows. Others may be diseased due to pests or be weak from weather problems; these can pose a hazard if they fall. Sometimes a tree has grown in such a way that it needs pruning or bracing to look better.

Pruning that requires a ladder is best left to experts, as is any work with a chain saw, says Vargas. An arborist can also advise how frequently they will need to return. You may be able to tackle simple pruning jobs with practice and help from books like *Edward F. Gilman's An Illustrated Guide to Pruning* (Thomson Learning, 2002) and the ISA's online articles, "Pruning Young Trees" and "Pruning Mature Trees."

Typical care for trees and shrubs involves sufficient watering, fertilizing, aeration and spraying to control "bad" insects and prevent diseases. But too much watering and fertilizing can also do damage. This is likely to happen if the trees are surrounded by grass that gets regularly watered. "Grasses tend to require more water than trees do, so you have to find the right balance for each," certified arborist Luana Vargas says. Spraying should be done on a case-by-case basis with the right pesticide that won't kill beneficial insects, such as some ladybugs that eat bugs harmful to trees, she adds.

Tree & shrub removal

Sometimes, a tree or shrub may need to come down because it's dead or dying, presents a hazard to wires, is crowding out other trees or shrubs, was a poor choice for its climate or is in the way of construction. Sometimes, a tree can be transplanted if it's not too old and the root ball isn't too large. "But if it's too big, the arborist may not be able to get the entire root mass out, and the tree will lose a lot of its roots and can't adapt to its new setting," says Vargas. An arborist knows how to protect trees during construction or, if some must be taken down, is skilled to weigh which ones are unlikely to survive the process, Vargas says.

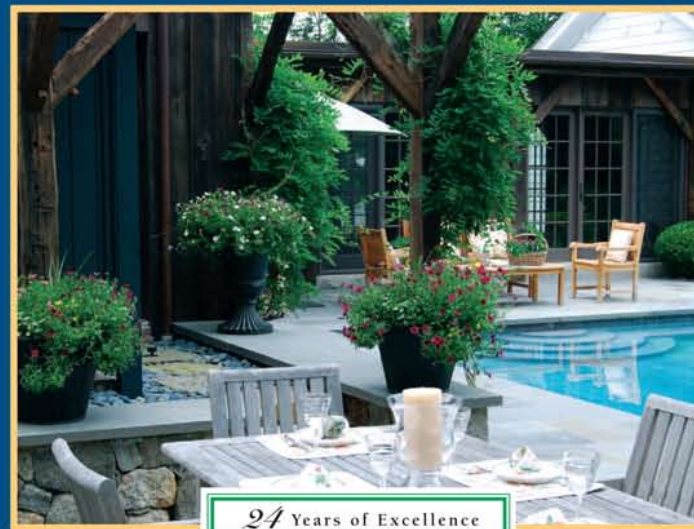
For more information:

To find arborists in your area and learn how they can help you, go to the ISA's Web site at treesaregood.com or to other organizations' sites. Always ask for proof of insurance, licenses, necessary permits and references. Also, contact your local extension service for additional information.



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