

38 SECRETS — TO A — BEAUTIFUL LANDSCAPE



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#1 - Make Planting Beds Plenty Large Enough

Establish the outline of the bed design that you would like for your landscaping.

Most people are too conservative when comes to laying out the planting beds. Make the beds plenty large enough.



All beds should be at least 4' wide at their narrowest point.

Trust me on this, anything smaller is too small, and down the road you are going to wish you did it different.

Take into consideration the size of the plants once they mature. Sure you can keep them trimmed, but you can not keep them dwarfed.

You've got to give them some room to grow so that your landscape will come together and look nice five years from now. Your landscaping should look better in five years than it does now.

The above photo is a simple ranch home. By getting a little extravagant with the bed sizes and extending the beds considerably beyond the ends of the house, this house will take on an entirely different appearance. Proper landscaping can completely transform a home.

#2 - Raise the beds at least 10" with good rich topsoil

This is the most important step of all, and most people mess it up. Topsoil is expensive, and wheelbarrowing it is hard work.

Don't let either of these points enter into your decision of how much topsoil to buy.



If you're working on a very tight budget, then spend all your money on topsoil.

You can always add more plants, or put in different plants later on.

But once you have the landscaping installed you can't go back and add another 6" of soil,

at least you can't without doing a lot of hard and unnecessary work.

#3 - Selecting the Perfect Plants for Your Landscape

The secret to great landscaping is the plants you select. Plant selection is everything. Once you have the beds laid out, and raised at least 10" with good rich topsoil, design your landscape on paper.

You don't have to know exactly what kind of plants you want in your landscape, you just need to know where the very low growing plants are going to be, and how many of them you need.

How many medium sized plants do you need, and where are they going to be planted. And how many specimen plants will you need, and how many plants do you need to accent the specimens?

Then take your design to different garden centers, find the most knowledgeable person there, and start asking questions. Ask for their recommendations for each plant on the plan, and then ask to see the plant. Take note of the price of each plant, but don't let the price play much of a role in your final selections.

The nicest plants in the garden centers are the most expensive. Plants are funny creatures. Sometimes the less expensive plants look much nicer, and are actually bigger, but in the long run the more expensive plant will serve you better.

The price of a plant is determined by the amount time it takes to grow it, and the costs incurred in growing it. Thus fast growing plants are cheaper than slow growing plants, but slow growing plants almost always make better plants in the end.

If your money is tight don't cut corners. Just do one area of your landscape at a time, or buy the plants you can afford, and then buy the others next year. Your goal should be to end up with a beautiful landscape, and if it takes a few years to complete your landscaping, that's O.K.

[Make money growing small plants at home...](#)
[Mine have earned thousands! \(click here to read how\)](#)

#4 - Get the Best Landscaping Advice for Free, Locally

To get the best landscaping advice at a garden center, visit during the week early in the morning. This is usually when they are the least busy, and the most knowledgeable person is more likely to be available to help you.

#5 - Forget About Plastic or Cloth Weed Barrier

I have never seen either of these materials work, and I have pulled out thousands of yards of each.

And removing these materials after they have proven to be ineffective, is a real pain in the butt.

If left in, they show through the mulch on the edges and corners, and completely ruin the landscaping.



The reason they don't work is because you mulch over top of them. Mulch decomposes and becomes extremely rich topsoil, the perfect place for weeds to grow. You end up with the weeds growing on top of the weed barrier, and the roots of the weeds actually grow through the barrier, making it a real tough job to remove it.

You have two alternatives. You can use chemical weed controls that are very effective if done properly.



If you prefer not to use chemicals you can lay newspaper down over top of the soil and then mulch over the newspaper.

Make the newspaper 9 layers thick. This will stop the weed seeds in the topsoil from germinating without creating the hassles that plastic and other weed barriers cause.

The newspaper will just rot and decompose.

By the time that happens the original weed seeds that were in the topsoil will no longer be viable.

The only weeds that should grow after that are the weed seeds that blow in, and they are going to grow no matter type of weed barrier you install. The only way to keep the seeds that blow in from germinating is to keep the soil or mulch turned, or to use a pre-emergent herbicide.

#6 - Don't Fertilize the Plants As You Plant Them

Too much nitrogen can kill plants young and old if it is not applied properly. If you have raised your beds with good rich topsoil, then your plants should thrive.

You can use small amounts of organic fertilizer, but it really isn't necessary at the time of planting.

If you're planting in sandy or gravel based soil, then some well rotted organic matter is helpful, but don't get caught up buying all kinds of soil amendments from the garden center.

I spent almost twenty years landscaping hundreds of homes, and all we ever did was raise the beds with good rich topsoil.

We never added anything as we were planting, and I guaranteed every plant that we installed to live for one full year.

#7 - Do Not Install Your Plants Too Deep

This is a big mistake, made by thousands of people. Remember what you read about topsoil, plants need to breath.

They must have the ability to transfer oxygen to the root system. Planting them too deep is the equivalent of suffocating you or I.

Small container grown plants should be planted as follows.

Remove the plant from the container, and observe the soil ball that contains the root system of the plant.

The top of this soil ball should be planted so that one inch of it is above grade.

When you back fill the hole, cover the top of the soil ball with topsoil, leaving a slightly mounded area where the plant sits. Cover this mound with 1" of shredded mulch.



When planting balled in burlap plants install them so that 1" of the ball is above grade, and follow the above instructions.

It is not necessary to remove the burlap completely when planting. If the burlap is natural burlap that is biodegradable, leave it in tact.

This helps to stabilize the tree, so it will root into the new soil more quickly. If the burlap is nylon, you can leave it on, just slice it up with a knife.

The little tiny fibrous roots actually find their way through nylon burlap, spreading it open as the roots grow. Make sure you check around the stem of all burlaped plants looking for possible restrictions.

Nylon burlap should be loosened, giving the stem plenty of room to grow. Look closely for string tied around the stem. The diggers often wrap nylon or sisal string around the stem when they tie up the ball.

Sometimes plants are re-burlaped if they've been on the sales lot for a few months, and this can conceal string that was tied around the original ball. Check around the stems closely.

[Wanted! People who would like to work at home making and selling rooted cuttings.](#)

#8 - Planting Trick for Clay Soil

Many experts recommend over digging the planting hole and putting gravel in the bottom for drainage, and loose organic matter around the sides.

If you follow this advice in heavy clay soil, you might just as well call the plant undertaker while you are planting.

If you do this if you have heavy clay soil, what you are actually doing is creating a bathtub for you plants to drown in.

You are giving the water every opportunity to enter the planting hole, and no way to get out. Putting gravel in the bottom of a clay hole only increases the volume of water that can sit in the hole.

That's why I always advocate raising the planting beds 10" with good rich topsoil. This puts you 10" above the clay if that's the soil you have. Your plants will always be able to breath.

If you have sand or gravel, raising the beds 10" with good rich topsoil will provide the natural nutrition and moisture retaining ability that is often lacking in sand or gravel soils.

#9 - Turn a Boring Straight Wall Into a Beautiful Landscape



Every home has at least one straight wall across the front of the house.

You can see how I deal with straight walls when designing landscaping.

In this situation I used two Rhododendrons in the background, one on each end.

And then planted five Japanese Holly in between. The holly are planted in an arc. Around this house you can see variations of this same concept.

Repetition is very important when designing a landscape. Repeating concepts and using multiple numbers of one plant in groupings, makes for a nice landscape.

On a longer wall I just increase the number of plants. If this wall were longer I would have used two Rhododendrons on each end, and increase the number of Japanese Holly to seven, or nine.

I always use an odd number of plants for an arc so I have a center plant to use as the extreme point in the arc.

#10 - Landscape Trick for the Corner of Your House

Notice how large the bed on the corner of the house is.

This is a small house, yet I made this corner bed almost 15' in diameter.

Don't be too conservative with bed size.

This is a simple home, so a simple planting on the corner is just the ticket. The center plant is a Canadian Hemlock.



Being the sole plant in the center of the bed it becomes a specimen plant and is accented with lower plants around it.

The yellow plants are gold thread cypress, which are brilliant yellow all year long. Most people like yellow plants, but often times over use them. In this situation there are five plants around this Hemlock, but only three of them are yellow.

The other two not visible in this photo are Taxus Sebian, a dark green evergreen.

Using just three bright yellow plants against two different kinds of dark green evergreens creates a very nice contrast in the landscaping.

Adding the dark brown mulch to the mix only increases the effect.

#11 - Landscaping Around Porches & Sidewalks

Just about every home has a structural situation that will allow for a bed like the one you see off the corner of the porch.



Be it a porch, a sidewalk, or a jog in the wall, somewhere a bed like this can be constructed.

Once again, a specimen plant surrounded by five accent plants.

The specimen plant here is a Weeping Cotoneaster.

This is a man made effect achieved by grafting Cotoneaster Apiculata on to the stem of a Paul's Scarlet Hawthorne tree.

Cotoneaster Apiculata, also known as Cranberry Cotoneaster is a unique plant with a very unusual branching habit.

The accent plants surrounding the Cotoneaster are Emerald Gaiety Euonymus. A colorful, low growing evergreen with green and white variegated leaves.

#12 - Use Gentle, Sweeping Curves for Your Planting Beds

Notice how the outline of the beds are very gentle sweeping curves that can be easily maneuvered with a lawn mower.

Never make tight beds that require hand trimming or weed whacking of the grass.

Make nice gentle curves that are very easy to mow around, and your landscaping will flow like a river.



**[How I Made \\$3,771.80 in 1 Day Working From Home...
and How You Can Too!](#)**

#13 - Make Your Boring Sidewalks and Patios More Attractive

Grab a sledge hammer and start breaking up the sidewalk leading to your front door.



Chances are if you have a walk that was installed by a builder, it is boring, difficult to travel, and leaves limited landscaping possibilities.

I am also willing to bet that the soil around your house has settled, causing the walk to tip toward the house, creating a potential drainage problem.

Is your house and your walk new? It doesn't matter. If the walk is straight and boring, and the planting beds are too narrow, break it up and put in a nice new walk that you will love.

The house in the above photo belongs to relatives of mine. They had it built a couple of years ago, and allowed me to help with the design of the sidewalk as well as the landscaping.

A typical home builder would have installed a straight sidewalk, but their builder was very open to the idea of a curved walk after he saw the design I was suggesting, and he did a great job of installing this walk.

Not only is this walk much more attractive than a straight walk, but it is also much more user friendly. People don't walk square corners. This walk provides a very scenic stroll to the front door. This photo was taken during the winter, so the plants are dormant, but this walk is surrounded by beautiful plants.

The small tree in the center of the walk is a Waterfall Lace Leaf Weeping Japanese Maple, and there is a well type landscape light installed under the tree to up light the tree.

My relatives love this walk and the landscaping possibilities it created. Do yourself a favor. Slow down and decide exactly how you want your home to look a few years from now.

Even if it means putting the landscaping off for another year to do a nice sidewalk, it will be worth it in the long run.

This walk would have been even more attractive if it had been done in brick. And if you don't know how to finish concrete, brick is actually easier to do. As least from a skills, view point.

Anyone can do a brick sidewalk, and most of the companies that sell paving bricks offer instruction and will loan or rent you any tools that you may need.

This is a patio to the right that I designed for another relative. It's actually two patios connected with an



arced walkway. It just lends a different view to the patio area.

#14 - Increase the Bed Size Around Trees

The photo below is an early spring picture of our front yard.

You can see by the lawn how early this photo was taken, the grass hasn't even started to actively grow yet.



Take a look at the flower beds around the two trees in this photo.

See how large those beds are?

Most people are afraid to make a bed around a tree that large.

We get a lot of compliments on these flower beds.

Each bed has hundreds of bulbs that bloom in early spring, then once the bulbs are done and the danger of frost has past, we plant annual flowers.

It's really beautiful all summer long.

#15 - Install Plants in Clusters to Enhance Your Design

Along the property line is part of our little plant nursery. Just to the left of the nursery is a raised bed that is just loaded with beautiful flowering shrubs, and a few ornamental trees.



When we bought this house the backyard was quite bare, and as flat as a pancake.

I built the mounds by digging out the two areas that are now our little nursery, and using the soil to build beautiful landscaping mounds.

In the foreground of this picture you can see some small ornamental grasses and Hosta. To the left of those there are four or five Red Twig Dogwood and about three Purple Sandcherry.

Installing your plants in clusters like this adds to the effectiveness of the overall design. Of course my motive with most of these plants was to install plants that I could use as stock plants from which we take cuttings.

#16 - Add Landscaped Mounds to Create a Beautiful Backyard



What you are looking at is four different landscaped mounds.

Creating this type of a setting in your backyard is a great landscaping idea.

As you can see it's beautiful, and a joy just to walk through.

This photo is by far one of my favorites from my pictures of landscape designs series.

The bed that was right in front of me as I took this picture contains two kinds of Viburnum, a small Pink Dogwood Tree, a Japanese Red Maple Tree, three Nikko Blue Hydrangea, three Golden Globe Arborvitae, several Variegated Euonymus, the Purple Sandcherry and Red Twig Dogwood you saw in the earlier photo.

As you can see, not a lot of organized design, but plenty of color and blooms.

Now look to the landscaping mound to the right of this photo. This is a landscaping idea that can be used in a multitude of situations. Notice the two rows of ornamental grasses. The dark green (back row) are Maiden Grass, and the light color grasses in the front row are Fountain Grass. Both are very hardy, grow to a height of five to six feet, and are absolutely beautiful.

Using them in staggered rows like this is very effective. The dark green Maiden Grass provides an excellent background for the green and yellow variegated Fountain Grass.

Planting them up on this mound shows them off even more, and once they fill out for the summer they provide a tremendous amount of privacy for our patio.

If you'll notice, they are positioned to block the opening created by the grass walkway that leads to our patio, giving both us and the neighbors some privacy.

The same landscaping idea can be used along garage walls, along property lines, or along a fence that you would like to make more aesthetically pleasing.

The mound to the right also contains another Japanese Red Maple Tree, two Chinese Dogwood Trees, a small Laceleaf Weeping Japanese Red Maple, a few Gold Drop Potentilla, and a few Variegated Weigela.

Even the back side of this mound is landscaped, even though our neighbors see more of it than we do.

You can't see it from this picture, but the mound to the left contains a number of very interesting plants and a beautiful waterfall that is right off our patio.

From this angle you can see the Weeping Pussy Willow Tree, a few Variegated Hosta, some Coreopsis, Stella D'Oro Daylilies, and two large Morning Light Ornamental Grasses.

#17 - Add a Patio and Waterfall for the Perfect Place to Relax

You can see how I wrapped the patio around the two existing trees and gave it a very irregular shape.

Notice how the ornamental grasses providing privacy for the patio.



You can see the side of the waterfall and the pond.

Again, in this bed notice how I used clusters of Hosta and Daylilly.

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#18 - Use Marking Paint to Layout Your Planting Bed

The easiest way to mark out your garden bed is to use a can of marking paint that can be purchased at a hardware store.

Marking paint is designed specifically for painting lines on the ground and it only works when the can is inverted.

You may even find cans of spray chalk instead of paint for marking out your garden bed. I've always used the paint because the lines will hold up better if they happen to get wet.

When outlining the area for your new garden bed, give careful consideration to what is going to be planted in the bed, and then determine how large each plant is going to be when fully mature.

You can keep shrubs trimmed to a certain size and perennials can be divided to keep them at the desired size, but be realistic when making estimates of their mature size.

Trust me when I tell you that underestimating the size of plants as they mature and making the garden bed too small for the mature plants is the Number One mistake made by do-it-yourself landscapers.

If the garden bed is too small, the landscape is going to look silly as the plants mature and reach their full potential.

Typically, a garden bed should never be narrower than 42" and corner beds should be at least twelve feet in diameter. What about island beds?

A tiny island bed floating out in the middle of a spacious front lawn just looks terrible! To make an island bed look good, it must be twenty to forty feet long and a minimum of twelve feet in diameter on at least one end.

#19 - Install Plastic Drain Pipes to Downspouts to Keep Beds from Flooding

I install plastic drain pipe on the ends of my downspouts so all the water from my gutters gets dumped out on the lawn, and not in my planting beds. That makes a huge difference.

Plants need water just like you and I, but very few plants like wet feet. Any water they received should drain away quickly. Their roots need to breath, and if the soil is too soggy, they can not breath.

#20 - Do Your Heavy Pruning In the Winter

Winter is a good time to do some pruning if the temperatures are around 30 degrees or so. I don't recommend pruning if it's considerably below freezing because the wood is brittle and will shatter when you make a cut.

One of the advantages of pruning during the winter is that you can see much better what needs to be cut out and what should stay. At least that's true with deciduous plants. The other advantage is that the plants are dormant, and won't mind you doing a little work on them.

Ornamental trees should be pruned to remove competing branches. Weeping Cherries, Flowering Dogwoods, Flowering Crabapples etc. have a tendency to send branches in many different directions.

It is your job to decide how you want the plant to look, and then start pruning to achieve that look.



But first stick your head inside the tree and see what you can eliminate from there. This is like looking under the hood, and when you do you'll see a lot of small branches that have been starved of sunlight, that certainly don't add anything to the plant, they are just there, and should be cut out.

Any branch that is growing toward the center of the tree where it will get little sunlight should be cut out. Where there are two branches that are crossing, one of them should be eliminated. Once you get the inside of the plant cleaned up, you can start shaping the outside.

Shaping the outside is actually quite easy. Just picture how you want the plant to look, and picture imaginary lines of the finished outline of the plant. Cut off anything that is outside of these imaginary lines. It is also important to cut the tips of branches that have not yet reached these imaginary lines in order to force the plant to fill out.

For the most part plants have two kinds of growth. Terminal branches and lateral branches. Each branch has one terminal bud at the very end, and many lateral branches along the sides.

The terminal buds grow in an outward direction away from the plant. Left uncut they just keep growing in the same direction, and the plant grows tall and very thin. That's why the trees in the woods are so thin and not very attractive.

When you cut a branch on a plant, the plant sets new buds just below where you cut. When you remove the terminal bud the plant will set multiple buds, this is how you make a plant nice and full. Don't be afraid to trim your plants, they will be much nicer because of it. The more you trim them, the fuller they become.

Lots of people have a real problem with this. They just can't bring themselves to prune. Especially when it comes to plants like Japanese Red Maples. It kills them to even think about pruning a plant like this. Just do it! You'll have a beautiful plant because of it.

Look at the plant objectively. If you see a branch that looks like it's growing to far in the wrong direction, cut it. If you make a mistake it will grow back. Not pruning is the only mistake you can make. I hope this helps and doesn't get you in trouble with your significant other. Many a family feud has started over pruning.

#21 - Think of Your Landscape Design as the Stairway to Your Home

A good landscape design will stair step from low to high, starting with the very front bed. Actually your lawn is step one, then the bed, then low growing shrubs, then medium high shrubs, then the taller plants in the back. In a bed that isn't against a wall it should stair step from all sides with the middle of the bed being the high point.

Specimen plants are the exception to the stair stepping effect. A specimen plant like a Lavender Twist Redbud Tree or a beautiful Japanese maple are planted in the center of a bed, and accented with lower growing plants that sort of act like the picture frame for the specimen plants.

#22 - Landscape Design Idea for the Outside Corner of a Sidewalk



Contrary to popular believe landscape designs don't always have to be balanced all in proportion. A couple of important aspects of landscape design are specimen plants, accent plants and repetition.

Repetition is really important. You can repeat themes and switch out plants and it will “feel” different but at the same time fit together seamlessly.

[**Wanted! People who would like to work at home making and selling rooted cuttings.**](#)

#23 - Use Ground-Cover Plants to Enhance Your Specimen Plants and for Weed Control

There are a lot of Junipers to choose from, and most of them I do not like at all. ‘Table Top’ is an exception to that rule. It is low growing, slower growing than many, and very easy to maintain. Two of my other favorite Junipers are ‘Blue Rug’ and ‘Green Mound’.

I urge you to not select plants that “look just like” any one of these. Chances are they will not perform the same and in my very opinionated opinion many of them quickly become “Jungle like”! Blue Rug Juniper and Green Mound Juniper are very low growing and ground hugging.

They both grow into an evergreen ground cover, much like carpeting. They keep the weeds out and look great. I often use them under Japanese maples.

Blue Star Juniper is another nice Juniper.

#24 - Plant in Groupings of Odd Numbers and Repeat the Groupings When Possible.

Plants are much more effective when you use them in multiple numbers and it's usually easier to work them into the planting if you use odd numbers.

This is a "loose rule to follow". Don't get all caught up in trying to make it perfect. If you follow my suggestions loosely it will look great! I promise!

#25 - Add an Island to Your Front Yard

Island plantings can really add some sparkle to any front yard.

This is an island planting right in front of our house.

After this photo was taken we made some minor changes to this planting so I'll explain how it was when this photo was taken and what improvements we've made to it.



This planting is pretty simple. Two specimen trees, three different kinds of Heuchera and some tulip bulbs that you can't see in this photo.

The green tree to the left is a Lavender Twist Red Bud Tree. Very much a weeping tree with green heart shaped leaves all summer, but covered with Tiny Lavender flowers in the spring.

The little red tree to the right is a Laceleaf Weeping Japanese Red Maple, the variety is 'Crimson Queen'. There are three different kinds of Heuchera in this planting as well.

To the right the dark ones are 'Midnight' in the middle 'Caramel' and to the left a variety with green and white variegated leaves and I don't remember

the actual variety, I planted these a long time ago and they were patented so I don't propagate them.

#26 - Broken Rocks, Bricks, Patio stones and bones can be pretty doggone attractive



Because we need to do something with the huge pile of soil, and because we need a nice big bed in the nursery where we plant things that we'd like to take cuttings from, we rummaged through the rock pile, re-arranged the dirt pile a bit, and turned it into this landscape planting.

I'll walk you through some of the landscape design ideas and strategies that went into this thought process.

Broken rocks, bricks, patio stones and bones can be pretty doggone attractive.

When I first started clearing this property for the nursery I started finding all kinds of rocks, patio blocks, bricks, broken concrete blocks, chunks of concrete etc., so I just started a rock pile over in the poison ivy patch. Shudda given that more thought!

So Amber, Cathy and I started digging through the rock pile and with a sledge hammer we broke up any piece that looked too much like it was supposed to.

At we first this seemed like a crazy idea and we started fishing out broken clay tiles, pieces of concrete that had been painted, just about every kind of random thing you can think of, including a bone! Yes, we found a big ole bone and decided that it too would go into this wall.

I'm not sure, but it could be Jimmy Hoffa's hip bone. Don't tell the feds, they'll be out here digging up my nursery! If this is Jimmy Hoffa's resting place then he's a lucky guy in my book. Okay, so he wasn't all that lucky but you know what I mean.

So armed with a pile of debris I turned Amber and Cathy loose on the wall and wished them well. They did an awesome job and I love the randomness of things that went into this little wall.

If you look closely you can see how many different kinds of things we found in that rock pile. No, we did not mortar, cement or glue the rocks into place, we just stacked them up making a wall.

My [Backyard Growers](#) know that my motto is keep it simple, and by all means don't over complicate a simple thing. If a rock or a hip bone comes loose we can just place back into the wall in a new spot.

#27 - Use Shredded Hardwood Bark Mulch

Shredded hardwood bark mulch is made from 100% tree bark, and not ground up wood. Therefore it contains a great deal more nutrition for your plants and as it decomposes it greatly improves the soil in your gardens.

When the logs of hardwood trees arrive at the saw mill one of the first things that happens is the logs are put through a de-barking machine and all of bark is removed from the logs before they are cut into lumber.

The bark is shredded and often times it's shredded two or three times. That's what they mean when they say double or triple ground.

But the most important thing for you to know is to confirm that you are indeed buying mulch that is made 100% from hardwood bark.

Because . . . there are a lot of mulches that pretend to be hardwood bark mulch and they are not.

#28 - The Impostors! Red Mulch, Black Mulch, and Brown Mulch

All of the impostors are dyed to get their color.

The impostors, as I call them, are mulches that are made of ground up wood, usually pallets. These mulches contain little to no bark at all and are 100% wood. Wood might be okay as a mulch to keep down weeds, but not only do wood mulches contain no nutrition for your plants, they actually pull nitrogen from the soil and the wood decomposes.

Once the pallets are ground up to look like mulch, the ground material is dyed so it has a deep color. Today a lot of people like these mulches because they are red or black in color because of the dye.

That's fine, and using this kind of mulch to mulch the beds around your house is okay. I don't like these wood mulches for several reasons.

One, the mulch floats out of the beds too easily and is always all over the sidewalk. Plus these mulches really don't break down all that well.

I want a mulch that is going to improve my soil, not pull nutrients from the soil. But as a mulch they are okay. In potting mix they would be disastrous!

#29 - The Best Way to Use Compost in Your Landscape

Many supply yards that sell mulches also sell compost. Compost can vary considerably from supply yard to supply yard. For the most compost materials are great for the soil.

They really don't make the best mulches because they are really fine textured and contain enough nutrition that weeds will grow right in the compost.

So compost materials shouldn't be used as a mulch, but they are great for adding additional organic matter to a landscaping bed. Most compost materials are made from leaf compost, maybe mushroom compost, and sometimes they include material from sewage plants.

It's important to know for sure what's in the compost that you are using. Should the compost that you buy contain any material from a sewage plant you should not use it in your vegetable garden.

#30 - Add a Professional Edge to Your Landscape Beds

One of the most important components of creating a landscape project is digging out the bed.

People often ask me what they should do to separate the bed from the grass and weeds and to keep the soil from the bed from washing away.



You can go and ask any employee at a big box store what you should use and they will sell you everything from timbers, stones, blocks, little plastic edging to metal edging and the truth of the matter is I've landscaped over 500 properties you don't really need any of that.

Remember you still have to cut the grass and maintain your landscape design so you don't need any rocks, bricks or edging getting in the way, or have to do any extra weed whacking or trimming.

What you really need to know is the proper way to edge a bed. I always start high and then taper down to the grass and of course, the tool of choice is the very heavy duty square nursery spade.

Landscapers and nurserymen all use this tool because it is the one tool that makes the job so much easier. It works really really well when you take a file and sharpen the spade. The sharper the spade, the easier to slice through the soil, roots, grass and weeds.

#31 - Find Plants That Will Thrive in the Shade

Here are my recommendations of 25 full shade plants that will look great in your yard.

Hellebore

Sometimes called the winter rose, hellebore blooms in the late winter or early spring. Blooms come in a wide variety of shades- white, red, pink, purple, orange, yellow, tan... With leathery leaves and thick petals (not to mention winter blooms!), you'd swear this plant is fake. They grow in zones 4-9.

Hydrangea

When it comes to flowers, hydrangea go for the gusto. The huge flower clusters bloom late spring into early autumn as either mophead (large round or conical clusters) or lace cap (flat, loosely arranged blooms). While white hydrangeas will always bloom in shades of white, the pink or blue flowering varieties can be changed by the soil. The more acidic the soil, the more blue the blooms will be. Alkaline soil produces pink blooms.

Astilbe

Astilbe is a cute little bush with interesting leaves that add texture to your landscape. They sport red, pink or white flowering plumes in the spring

through summer months. They are tolerant of wet soil and grow well in zone 3-9.

Leather Leaf Viburnum

Most viburnums tolerate partial shade fairly well. There are a few like the Mapleleaf, Arrowwood or Leather Leaf that perform quite well in full shade. The leather leaf viburnum pictured above gets pale yellow, showy blooms that are fragrant each May. As fall approaches, it gets red (or sometimes black) fruit. Viburnums can grow up to 15 tall, but are easily pruned to stay at a smaller size.

Taxus

The taxus (sometimes called a Yew) is an evergreen with dense growth, making it perfect for low maintenance hedges. The females produce colorful red berries. This shrub is tolerant of dry soils. Although the yew is a popular landscape plant, it should be noted that this plant (particularly the seed inside of the berry) is extremely poisonous. In fact, the name taxus means toxic. Please watch pets and small children around this plant.

Browallia

Browallia is grown as a warm weather annual throughout much of the United States. In zones 9 and 10 it can be kept as a perennial. This bushy little plant grows to about 12" high and produces lavender to dark blue trumpet shaped blooms. The secret to keeping browallia happy is moist soil with good drainage. A few hours of filtered sunlight will also help to keep it blooming.

Ajuga (Common Bugelweed)

Ajuja (often called bugelweed) is a fast growing creeping ground cover. The leaves have a rich copper or deep purple coloration. With more sunlight, the foliage tend to display more green hues. In early summer ajuja grows a tall, purple flower stalk that is very similar to hosta. The plant itself stays under 6 inches tall. Its deer resistant and found in zones 3-10.

Bleeding Hearts

Bleeding hearts get their name from their shapely flowers. Early spring brings rows of heart-shaped flowers in shades of pink and white. The plant will grow to 2-3 feet in height and thrive in zones 3-9. They are deer resistant.

Purple Dragon Deadnettle

This spreading ground cover displays a beautiful silver toned leaf. It grows best in moist shade and is known to be deer resistant. It's a fast spreader, but not invasive. Flowers can be white, pink or purple.

Clematis

Although often seen as a trailing perennial vine, clematis can be trained into shrub form. It grows best in partial- full shade and produces spectacular flowers. Some thing to note (especially if you are having problems with your clematis blooming): Much like hydrangea, some clematis bloom on new wood and some bloom on old wood. Find out which type you have before doing any heavy pruning.

Vinca Minor

Around here, it's pretty common to run across a patch of vinca while walking through the woods. This trailing evergreen vine produces small purple flowers throughout most of the year. It's a good spreader and is great for filling in bare patches. Vinca can also be found as vinca major (a slightly larger, more invasive version) and as annual vinca (a completely different plant that loves full sun). In some areas vinca minor is considered invasive, in others it is sold as ground cover. I have a patch in my landscape bed and I have found it to be easily contained.

Pachysandra

This evergreen perennial ground cover stays under 1 foot in height. It is tolerant of clay and dry soil and gets delicate white flowers in the early spring.

Bunchberry Dogwood

Bunchberry dogwood is not a tree, but more of a low growing creeper. The white flowers and red berries look just like what we have come to expect from a dogwood. This plant is tolerant of wet soil and prefers cooler soil temperatures. It grows best in zones 2-6.

Euronymous

While many varieties have dainty yellow or white flowers, its the foliage that gets noticed on this plant. The variegated leaves on this low mounding hedge plant do a great job of lightening dark areas. This compact evergreen is often pruned to about 3 ft in height. They are great for hedges, foundation areas and erosion control. They grow in zones 4-8.

Bergenia

Bergenia is also known as Pigsqueak because of its thick, leathery cabbage-like leaves. When you rub the leaves, they squeak! This low growing plant (up to 12") makes great ground cover. Bergenia is best suited for zone 3-8. April and May bring white to deep pink blooms. It is tolerant of drought and dry soil.

Fern

With over 12,000+ species there are very few places that a fern cannot grow. The majority prefer to grow in warm, shady areas. Ranging in sizes from itty-bitty (2 mm) to humongous (80 feet) you're sure to find a size that fits perfectly in your shady garden. Some (such as the Japanese painted fern) come in shades of silver that almost seem to glow.

Oxalis

Oxalis bulbs produce shamrock leaves that can be bright green, purple or any variation in between. It's dainty flowers are usually yellow or white, but they can be found in shades of pink and purple. They are incredibly easy to grow from bulb and look best when planted in tight groupings.

Kerria Japonica

This showy, spring flowering shrub is tough as nails. It grows in both wet or dry soil and bloom heavily with yellow pompom like flowers. The foliage resembles that of a rose- minus the thorns. This plant can grow in zones 4-9 and typically reach a height of 3-6 ft.

Creeping Thyme

Creeping thyme is a really neat plant. Its ground cover that can be walked on. Its really low growing (2-4 inches) and spreads to about 2 feet. Its a great, low maintenance plant for walkways and filling in bare spots where the soil isn't too wet. Creeping thyme gets small purple flowers late spring into early summer. In sunnier areas, they flower so much that you can barely see the leaves. In full shade, they won't flower quite as much.

Snow Angel Heuchera

Heuchera is a low growing (6-12 inches) with mounding clumps of crisp leaves that look good enough to eat. There is a huge variety of leaf colors and patterns available. Foliage can be variegated or marbled in shades of green, gold, purple and red. In late spring to early summer, they will produce a stalk with a bell-like blooms in white, pink or red.

Brunnera

I just love the large, heart-shaped brunnera leaves. Some varieties (Like Jack Frost) have variegated foliage of silver and green. Clusters of tiny blue flowers (similar in shape to a forget-me-not) bloom each spring. Brunnera generally prefer moist soil and grow in zones 3-8.

Geranium

There are many types of geraniums that thrive in both sun and shade and come in every color imaginable. Most geraniums are perennial in zones 9-11 and are often planted as annuals in cooler climates. (They can be overwintered to survive for a number of years.)

Hosta

Hosta are hardy in zones 3-8 and known to be one of the simplest plants to grow. They will grow in places where nothing else will. They get a stalk of purple or white bell shaped flowers, but they are mainly grown for their foliage. Leaves can be variegated, yellow, green, blue, ribbed, heart-shaped, striped... There's a hosta to suit everyone!

Flowering Maple

Flowering Maples are grown as houseplants here in Ohio. In zones 8-10 they can be grown outdoors as a woody shrub that reaches heights of 8 feet. Even in full shade, this lovely plant flowers year round in shades of red, pink, orange and yellow. The flowers look like a cross between a mallow and a hibiscus (to whom it is more closely related than the maple). Albutilon is not really a maple, but the leaves make it easily mistakable.

Impatiens

When it comes to shade flowers, you cannot go wrong with impatiens. They come in nearly every color available and are a no fuss annual that is sure to add lots of color to your shady area.

#32 - Add Some Fall Color to Your Landscape

I want to share with you a few plants that I think are noteworthy if you'd like to add some fall color to your landscape. And they are all just as nice during the growing season, just different colors.

Heuchera



Goshiki Shidare Japanese Maple



Waterfall Japanese Maple



#33 - The Big Topsoil Rip Off!



When you buy topsoil it's important that you buy good topsoil.

Today there are too many soil dealers that are taking really heavy, sticky clay soil, running it through a soil shredder and selling as good topsoil.

And it's not good topsoil. It looks great in the pile, but the minute it gets wet it turns to soup, then mud, then packs hard as concrete. Good topsoil doesn't need to be shredded. Good topsoil when you squeeze it in your hand will not stick together like a softball.

When growing plants for any purpose, drainage is everything.

If you are landscaping your house, or building a raised bed in the middle of the yard for a landscape planting, the soil doesn't have to be perfect, but it should at least drain well. Good topsoil is great for raised beds, but not pots. Definitely don't use topsoil in a container.

#34 - Planting Deer Resistant Plants in Your Landscape

There are things we can use to deter deer from eating our plants. Elephant garlic, Deer-Off, Liquid Fence, baby formula, hot sauce, and (my personal favorite) predator urine do alright for dissuading them, but rather than chase deer away from plants they love we can save ourselves a lot of frustration by planting things that they don't particularly like to eat.

Now, you might have heard that there is no such thing as a deer proof plant. All plants are subject to being mowed down by deer if they are hungry enough. There are, however, plants (nice looking ones) that are generally avoided by deer.

Here they are:

- American Holly
- Arrowwood Viburnum
- Barberry
- Bayberry
- Bleeding Heart
- Bluebell
- Blue Fescue
- Butterfly Bush
- Catmint
- Common Boxwood
- Dwarf Alberta Spruce
- Foxglove
- Germander
- Hummingbird Mint
- Iris
- Japanese Blood Grass
- Lamb's Ear
- Lily of the Valley
- Lungwort
- Maiden Grass
- Oregano

Poppy (note: Oriental Poppy scored a silver)
Purple Moor Grass
Red Hot Poker
Riverbirch
Rosemary
Russian Olive
Russian Sage
Snap Dragon
Switchgrass
Thyme
Yucca

#35 - Add Colorful and Flowering Plants to Brighten Up Your Yard in the Early Spring

Your yard should have a sequence of color starting in spring and taking you on a journey of color and joy throughout the year. Here are a few plants to really wake up your yard in early spring.

Lynnwood Gold Forsythia



PJM Dwarf Rhododendron



Orange Dream Japanese Maple



Lavender Twist Weeping Redbud Tree



#36 - Tending to Your Winter-Damaged Plants

1. Be patient. Don't rush things, don't try and rush your plants back to health.
2. Don't write off a plant as a total loss right away. They are damaged, in pain, give them a chance to bounce back. It might be mid June before winter damaged plants start to show signs of life.

3. Do a scratch test. This is how you test to see if a plant, or a branch on a plant has died. Just scratch the bark of your plants with your finger nail. If the tissue below the bark is green and firm your plants are fine. If the tissue is brown and mushy that part of the plant is dead.
4. Eventually you'll want to prune away any and all dead branches, but only after you are certain that those branches are dead.
5. Do not fertilize plants that are struggling or under stress. Just leave them be. The plants know what to do and they will, if you only leave them alone while they nurse themselves back to health.

#37 - Protect Your Plants from the Frost

So at home with a small number of fruit crops what can you do to save them from a coming frost?

It's probably not feasible for you to create a breeze in your yard without having the neighbors trying to have you committed. But you can use your garden hose to wash the frost away.

Get up early before the sun comes up, or just as the sun is coming up and try rinsing the frost from your plants.

Be Careful, don't blow up your plumbing!

What???? Keep in mind, come winter you should disconnect all garden hoses from the sill-cocks so the water can drain from the fixtures so they don't freeze and break.

Today most of our homes have frost freeze sill-cocks to protect them from freezing. However, these fixtures are only frost free if you disconnect the garden hose so the water inside the fixture can drain out.

If you leave the hose connected the fixture will freeze, break and could create a real mess in, or under your house. So if you're out there in the

early spring hooking up a garden hose, be sure to disconnect it as soon as you are done.

Use the heat that Mother Nature has provided for you.

Ground heat baby! Ground heat! In the nursery business we take every opportunity possible to utilize the natural heat from the ground. As you probably know the earth is warm.

Things below ground rarely freeze. They never freeze if you go below the frost line. So with plants that are close to the ground you can protect them from a frost, or even a freeze if you cover them up.

You can use plastic, newspaper, bed sheets, plastic tarps, anything you can find. But the thicker, more insulated the covering you use, the more protection you are providing for your plants.

Around here we have a store called Harbor Freight and they also have a website where you can order online. But they often advertised padded movers blankets at crazy low prices.

Those things would be perfect for covering strawberry plants, maybe blueberries or other low plants that you would like to protect. A heavy covering like that would do a great job of trapping in that ground heat.

Many gardening stores sell frost blankets and other devices that you can use to cover some of your fruit and vegetable crops from frost.

#38 - Here's an Easy Way to Tie Up Plants in Your Yard

A few days ago I was walking through the hardware store when this stuff caught my eye.

It's called Soft Wire Tie and basically it's rubber coated wire.



You can use it to tie up your plants without damaging them because it's very soft on the outside.

And the rubber coating is thick, making the wire tie almost a quarter inch wide.

This also helps to protect the plant much better than a thin string or wire.

Here in the nursery we do all kinds things with plants that means we have to tie them up and at the same time not damage the bark or stem of the plant. This Soft Wire Tie would be great for tomatoes since tomatoes are almost all soft tissue and can be damaged or broken easily.

Recommend Products:

The Backyard Grower's University

The University is a searchable library full of topics such as Propagation Tricks, Plant and Cutting Care, Business Stuff, Selling & Advertising, and more. It also includes access to The Legendary Backyard Grower's Video Collection... some of these videos date back to as early as 1992. And there's much, much more! [Click here to read more...](#)

Mike's Plant Propagation Kit

This is my automated plant propagation system that I use every year to root more than 10,000 cuttings. [Click here to read more...](#)