"Changing" Landscapes: Resource Efficient Landscaping Presents New Opportunities for the Landscape Industry

Change is taking place as many residents and businesses in our communities take a closer look at the impacts of landscaping practices on the environment and their pocketbooks. It is old news that traditional landscapes that include large turf areas, areas of high density plantings, and extensive use of annual color are wasteful and inefficient. However, many landscape professionals "cling" to the perception that their customers want this kind of landscaping around their homes or businesses. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, a growing number of residents and businesses are recognizing that changes in landscape design and content can produce attractive landscapes that are resource-efficient - requiring less water, fertilization and producing less waste. There are new and expanding opportunities for enlightened members of the landscape industry to recognize this change and use it to their advantage. Landscapers who incorporate resource-efficient practices in their design and maintenance work will find expanding demand in the communities they serve.

So how does a landscape transition from traditional to resource-efficient forms of landscaping? It's simple and many may already be doing so. It is important to understand some of the important components of Resource Efficient Landscaping so that it can be effectively incorporated into practice. Two primary components are drought tolerance and low waste.

Drought Tolerance

Many landscapers are already familiar with issues surrounding low water usage, and incorporate drought tolerant landscaping in their work. However, it is always important to keep drought-tolerant landscaping as a central focus of design and maintenance, especially when you consider that our water supplies will continue to be limited as our population continues to grow.

First and foremost, limit turf areas, since grass is a high consumer of water. Select plantings that have reduced water needs, and place plants that have greater needs in areas of reduced sun exposure. Consult an

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updated Water Use Classification of Landscape Species (WUCOLS) chart to select low water use plantings that will thrive in your region. Good soil preparation and mulching also contribute to efficient water use. Soil with high organic content will retain moisture rather than repel it. Prepare and maintain soil with compost to raise organic content and condition the soil. Mulching helps retain moisture in the soil and has other benefits including weed control and soil consistency. Mulch liberally in areas of high solar exposure to keep moisture from evaporating away.

Low Waste Generation

Landscape professionals may be less familiar with waste issues, but they are no less important. "Green" waste, much of it coming from landscape maintenance, continues to be a large part of what our communities throw away. Most everyone understand the "ethic" of recycling and participates in recycling programs in their communities. This same concern for waste reduction should also extend into the yardscape by using low-waste plantings and practices that will reduce waste generation.

First, use low waste plantings in the landscape. Select drought-tolerant slow growth plantings appropriate for the region. Also consider placement and spacing. Don't crowd landscaping where minimal growth will require pruning. Proper spacing between plants allows more natural growth, minimizing the need for excessive pruning.

Make every attempt to prune conservatively. Pruning is a large contributor of waste when performed in an excessive and haphazard fashion. Pruning should be limited to maintain controlled, but natural growth patterns. "Topping" or "shearing" where large quantities of material is removed is wasteful and unhealthy.

Using shredded green waste as a mulch is a great reuse of waste materials. Mulching provide a variety of benefits, including weed prevention, moisture retention, mud abatement and erosion control. As an added benefit, when organic mulch decomposes, it will condition the soil and add important nutrients.

Finally, an important step in reducing waste generation is to reduce turf areas. Grass lawns are a heavy contributor of waste, especially during the warmer months. By reducing turf area, maintenance, waste disposal and irrigation requirements can be significantly reduced. Removal of small, irregular shaped turf areas removes difficult mowing transitions, which results in easier maintenance. Replace grass with slow-growth, drought-tolerant ground covers for attractive landscaping with significantly lower maintenance requirements and costs.

Marketing Resource Efficiency

Becoming a "green" (environmentally conscious) landscape professional carries more weight in the marketplace these days than in the past. Not only are more residents and businesses aware of the importance of saving water and recycling, but many have adopted "green" practices themselves. Landscape professionals can use this new awareness to position themselves as an environmentally friendly service. Begin to cultivate an "attitude" within your company that resource efficient landscaping is "good for business" environmentally, economically and competitively. Begin to integrate some or all of the practices discussed her into company practices. You will find that new and existing customers will respond positively to practices that help the environment and make economic sense. For additional information on Resource Efficient landscapes, contact the Landscape Management Outreach Partnership (LMOP) at (925) 906-1801.