

# livescapes

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SPECIAL SECTION OF *LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT*

## Good design, green design

**IMPROVE YOUR BOTTOM LINE BY CREATING ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY, MONEY-SAVING LANDSCAPES.** BY KENDALL WEYERS

**I**N THIS AGE of increasing environmental awareness, all segments of the business community are being carefully evaluated for their shade of green. More scrutiny is also being applied to costs due to the challenging economic times. It has always been important to be aware of, and emphasize, the benefits you offer your customer, but now it is more important than ever. The customer is spending more carefully, considering both environmental and economic impact.

For landscapers, the good news is that good design has always offered environmental and economic benefits. Now is the time to clearly market those benefits. If you don't know the positive side effects of what you do, your prospective customer probably won't either.

### Lower maintenance costs, fewer inputs

A well-designed landscape will work with nature, rather than against it, resulting in fewer inputs and lower maintenance costs. When in balance with nature, landscapes have a wide range of plants in their optimum growing conditions, making them more resilient to weather

extremes and pest attacks. A diverse landscape discourages pests, not only by limiting their food source, but by providing habitat for natural controls. These "beneficials" range from insects and spiders, to fungi, bacteria, birds, and small mammals. The result is a balanced and diverse system that is at least partially self-sufficient.

Simply making the appropriate plant selection and placement is a huge first step. Care-



Trees can be used to shade homes, reducing summer cooling costs.

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ful plant selection for the light, moisture, soil, and wind conditions of the site will do two things:

- 1) It will increase the likelihood of growing healthy and attractive plants, with fewer replacements.
- 2) It will reduce the necessary levels of inputs, such as water, fertilizer, soil amendments, and pesticides.

Both of these benefits lower costs and make the landscape more sustainable. Of course it's possible to force plants to grow out of their range of optimum conditions, but to successfully do so usually requires more inputs.

A well-designed landscape uses water wisely and efficiently. This is accomplished by using efficient, properly designed irrigation systems, grouping plants of similar moisture needs together, and using at least some plants that need little or no added moisture. Native plants tend to be very deep-rooted, and as the old roots die off, they create channels for moisture penetration. The result is improved drainage and less runoff and erosion—both good for the environment.

### Lower energy use

An especially important, but often overlooked, benefit of good design is reduced energy use. All measures that reduce energy use are good for the environment, in addition to reducing costs. One landscape example is placing trees to limit summer solar gain in buildings, thus reducing cooling demands. If the designer carefully considers seasonal sun angles, those same trees can also be sited to allow passive solar heating in the winter, reducing heating demand. In addition to shade, trees and other plants contribute a cooling effect with transpiration from their leaves.

Shading air conditioners is also beneficial. The AC will operate more efficiently, saving fuel and money. Again, proper placement comes into play because of the importance of leaving ample space



Plants contribute a cooling effect with transpiration from their leaves and can be used to shade air conditioners, which lowers cooling costs.

between the plants and the AC to allow for adequate air flow.

Windbreaks are another landscaping technique that lowers energy use. By diverting winds and/or reducing their speeds, a more comfortable microclimate is created and winter heat loss is reduced.

Wise plant selection and bed layout also affect energy savings. Choosing lower maintenance turf grasses, making larger planting beds, and allowing more "native" areas all contribute. In situations where turf gets virtually no traffic or use, consider a native grass or prairie plant mix for lower maintenance, water, and fuel costs, higher biodiversity, and better water retention.

### Education is key

Some clients would have a hard time going for the native look, or tolerating a few insects or leaf spot. But attitudes are shifting, and when educated about the environmental and economic differences of various landscaping approaches, customers are more likely to make cost-saving choices.

Education of the customer may not always directly increase your bottom line, but it is one of the critical services you offer. An efficiently designed and installed sprinkler system is still wasteful when the user is watering the lawn every day or right after a 2-in. rain, for example.

Customers will certainly vary on their level of concern for environmental and

### THE WAY OF THE FUTURE?

Husqvarna has released details of a global gardening trend report produced, in which more than 6,000 people from eight countries were asked a series of questions relating to gardening and how the development of technology may impact their future behavior. Insights were gained into current trends and how social, cultural, economic and technological forces shape how homeowners with all sizes of yards spend their time and money.

> When asked about their vision of the yard of the future, 38% of the 1,000 U.S. homeowners surveyed suggested one that is entirely self-maintaining. Twenty-six percent want a yard that is a "self-sufficient ecosystem."

> Twenty percent of Americans surveyed feel the economic downturn affects their future gardening plans. Twenty-three percent want to grow their own food.

For a copy of the full report, and information on Husqvarna's line of EcoSmart solutions, visit [www.husqvarna.com/us/homeowner/press/](http://www.husqvarna.com/us/homeowner/press/).

economic issues. To increase your business's odds of winning, offer and market services that benefit both the environment and your customers' wallets. That way everyone wins. Kendall Weyers freelance writer and landscape designer based in Nebraska.



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