



12. YARD MAKEOVER

Creating Water-friendly Landscaping

WHY ACT?

Before your home or subdivision was built, the forest and soil that existed there functioned as a giant sponge and filter. Rainfall was absorbed into the forest soil, and the rich organic layer filtered out any impurities in the water. A typical rainfall didn't result in runoff. The water just filtered into the soil and recharged groundwater.

A conventional housing development site, however, is covered with impervious surfaces that short-circuit Mother Nature's water filtering and recycling plan. The result is that a lot more water runs off into the streams. This increased volume of water erodes stream banks and sends sediment downstream. Moreover, that water tends to be full of pollutants ranging from excess fertilizers to motor oil and even heavy metals from car brake pads. The good news is that you can give your yard a "makeover" that will put the landscape back to work as a filter. A water-saving landscape can be beautiful and highly distinctive. It also provides habitat to local wildlife. Best of all, your yard makeover makes your community more livable by creating attractive green space!

WATER ACTION

- Develop a plan for creating a more natural landscape. It's done by planting native trees and other native plants that can survive well on the normal rainfall of our region. Your goal is to reduce the percentage of lawn in your yard.
- In creating your plan, seek advice about native plants from your municipal arborist, extension service agent, or the National Wildlife Federation, www.nwf.org. To provide a more diverse, natural topography, consider creating gradual depressions in the landscape that will allow small amounts of rainwater to sink into the ground (see *Catch It While You Can*, Action 11, pg. 24).
- To make the transition from lawn to a more water absorbent natural landscape, try this method, which works best if you start in the fall:
 - In the parts of your yard you wish to makeover, insert a shovel into the ground in a grid pattern every foot, pushing down and wiggling the shovel to loosen the earth. That soil will now be a sponge to absorb runoff and allow it to enter the ground.

- Place a single layer of newspaper over the lawn, and cover it with two inches of shredded leaf mulch (available from your municipal government).
- Determine where you walk in your yard, and lay down thick wood mulch for your paths.
- After a few months of leaf mulch decomposition, plant native trees, shrubs, ferns, wildflowers, and groundcover.

MATERIALS

Newspaper, shredded leaf mulch, wood mulch, native plants, gardening tools

TIME

Several hours to plan and considerable time and pleasure to create your new landscape (minus all the time you will save by not having to mow or maintain your lawn!)

BENEFITS

You'll keep a lot of rainwater from running down your street and into storm drains and streams. Further, you'll reduce up to 50% of your yearly water use, save the time and money spent keeping up a green lawn, and attract birds and butterflies to your new backyard habitat!

