

SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPING

What is Sustainable Landscaping?

Did you know, most common grasses used for yards are not native to North America? This means that they require fertilizers, pesticides, and frequent watering to stay green. Relying on products like fertilizer and pesticides to keep yards, business properties, and other green spaces maintained is costly and not sustainable. For example, when fertilizers are overapplied, excess nutrients like nitrogen can be carried by rainfall - known as stormwater runoff - into our waterways, and even the groundwater. This leads to water pollution and can have major impacts on ecosystems, humans, and wildlife.

Sustainable landscaping refers to the way homeowners and businesses can design portions of their property to result in significant positive benefits for water quality, the environment, and public health.

Planting native plants, reducing fertilizer and pesticide applications, and decreasing water usage all improve our waterways and provide habitat for key species like pollinators. In addition to the environmental benefit, sustainable landscaping practices generally are lower maintenance once established, allowing you to spend your time and money elsewhere and not on yard work!



RESOURCES

- Sustainable Landscaping - NYSDEC
- Calibrate Your Spreader – Cornell Cooperative Extension Suffolk County
- Our Water Our Lives – Long Island Commission for Aquifer Protection
- Healthy Lawns, Clean Water – Suffolk County
- Sustainable Landscaping Resource Hub - LIRPC

Sustainable Landscaping in Action!

More and more Long Islanders are adopting sustainable landscaping practices on their properties. In 2025, more than 170 people across Nassau and Suffolk Counties installed a total of 20 rain barrels, created 5 rain gardens, and planted 160 native plants through the Long Island Garden Rewards Program!

Not only are these Long Islanders taking action to protect their waterways, but they were also reimbursed for their efforts. Learn more about the Long Island Garden Rewards Program and how to participate here: [Long Island Garden Rewards Program • NEIWPC](#)

Sustainable Landscaping Tips

Low Maintenance – Implement these practices for lower maintenance yard care:

- **Let it Grow** - Taller grass has deeper root systems which allows precipitation to slowly percolate through the soil instead of running off into our waterways. Deeper roots also help the plant to be more drought tolerant. If you set your mower setting to the recommend 3-inch grass blade height or higher, it could reduce how frequently you need to mow.
- **Xeriscaping** – Xeriscaping is a landscaping technique that aims to reduce or eliminate the need to use water on your property. The key to xeriscaping is to utilize drought-tolerant native plants that are acclimated to the climate. Also, replacing grass with rocks and mulch can help retain soil moisture and eliminate the need to use water.

Go Native. Native plants are adapted to the local climate and soil where they naturally occur. Making the transition from non-native to native grasses, plants, and shrubs around your property will allow you to become less dependent on fertilizer, pesticides, and water – saving you money!

Smart Fertilizing. If you are not currently using fertilizer and you are happy with how your lawn looks, then don't start fertilizing! If you do use fertilizer, consider these tips to fertilizer smarter:

- **Timing is key** – If you are going to fertilize, make sure you are applying at the right time. Grass cannot absorb nutrients when it is below 55°F or above 80°F. Application of fertilizer should **not** occur between November 1 and April 1, annually. To learn more about timing of fertilizer, look at the factsheet [here](#).
- **Keep grass clippings on your lawn** – After mowing, leave the grass clippings behind instead of bagging them up. Grass clippings are a natural fertilizer and can reduce the need for added nitrogen by 25 – 50 percent.
- **Calibrate your spreader** – All equipment used to spread fertilizer should be calibrated annually. Use the application rate found on the back of fertilizer packaging to calibrate accordingly. This can help reduce over spreading fertilizer. Learn how to calibrate your spreader [here](#).
- **Sweep up the excess** – If you notice excess fertilizer on driveways, walkways, and sidewalks make sure to sweep it up. Excess fertilizer on impervious surfaces can be picked up by stormwater runoff and enter our waterways.
- **Soil testing** - Before applying fertilizer, consider testing the soil to better determine if nutrients like nitrogen are needed. Testing soils can lead to better management as well as more productive soils. Visit [Nassau](#) and [Suffolk](#) County's Cornell Cooperative Extension website to get a soil test.

Be Smart About Watering. How you irrigate and use water on your property can have a big impact. Consider these tips for improved water conservation:

- **Water less often** – Did you know your lawn only needs about 1.5 inches of water per week? If it rains, there may be no need to water at all.
- **Collect rainwater** – Using rain barrels on your property prevents water from running off and ultimately carrying nutrients, or other containments, with it into our waterways. Rain barrels also help reduce our water usage, try watering your plants with water from the rain barrel instead of using a hose or other irrigation systems.
- **Improve irrigation systems** – Use irrigation systems that have rain sensors or smart irrigation controllers. This helps prevent irrigation systems from running during or after rainfall and wasting water.



Think about how your lawn care practices should work together. For example, it is important to apply fertilizer at the correct time of year, while also keeping in mind rainfall and your irrigation system. Do not apply fertilizer right before rainfall or before your sprinkler systems go off.

These are just a few sustainable landscaping tips; this is not a comprehensive list.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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