

# PRUNING THE BUDGET

## 10 WAYS TO MAINTAIN A GARDEN THAT LOOKS GOOD AND COSTS LESS

BY STEVE JACOBS

While many are pinching pennies amid the economic downturn, there are a number of thrifty ways to manage a garden and landscape to ensure it looks good and flourishes while also costing less to maintain. Here are several ways to scrimp on and save money, and details about what can be skipped when planting and managing a yard this year.

**1. Plant perennials instead of annuals.** Annuals are short lived, use excessive water and must be replaced, while there is a large selection of drought tolerant perennials that can live for many years and offer plenty of beautiful color.

**2. Eliminate lawn where you are not using it.** Lawns are one of the most intensive maintenance and water consuming plantings in a landscape, requiring weekly mowing, edging and recurrent irrigation.

**3. Leave lawn clippings—don't bag.** Many lawn mowers have a recycling feature which allows you to mow without bagging the clippings. Lawn clippings contain water and nutrients that can benefit your lawn. The result is a need for less water, fertilizer, and you don't need to pay for landscape debris removal or dumping.

**4. Prune naturally instead of formally.** When you prune for the natural growth habit of the plant you will reduce the amount of pruning needed per year, resulting in decreased costs. Hedging and balling your plants will create a need for frequent pruning, and the tools and/or professional landscape maintenance services that go with it.

**5. Cut back on water.** Reduce your watering schedule to the bare minimum required to keep the yard and garden healthy. Over watering can cause excessive growth, requiring even more maintenance, a higher water bill and a

greater instance of disease that will require further intervention.

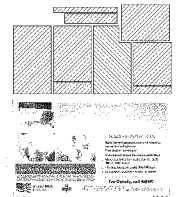
**6. Identify and rectify irrigation problems.** By keeping an eye on the condition of your irrigation system, including leaks, overspray, broken heads, incorrect water pressure and trajectory problems, you can reduce your water costs while also avoiding water damage to your home and hardscape.

**7. Apply a ground cover mulch to cut down on weeds—**and the need to purchase weed killers and the time to apply—and also water usage. Ground cover mulch creates a barrier so weed seed has a hard time germinating. It also adds organic matter to your soil and insulates the ground, which reduces the soil temperature and evaporation of soil moisture.

**8. Select drought tolerant plants.** These plants, like the Mediterranean and native variety, will use less water and can require very little maintenance.

**9. Put the right plant in the right spot.** Install plants that can grow to maturity where they are planted with minimal care or pruning. Such "zone appropriate" planting will ensure the plant or tree won't outgrow its space and need to be frequently pruned or, worse, relocated at risk of losing the plant altogether.

**10. Apply fertilizer modestly.** Fertilize only as needed based on the requirements of your individual plants. If you have good soil, some of your plants may need little or no fertilizer. Not only is over-fertilizing expensive and time consuming, it can also require more water and cause excessive growth resulting in increased maintenance needs. ♦



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