

Lawn and garden savings

Lawn and garden, irrigation and horticulture expert Steve Jacobs, president of San Diego-based Nature Designs Landscaping (www.naturedesigns.net), offers ways to save money on your yard.

- 1. Plant perennials instead of annuals.** Annuals are short lived, use excessive water and must be replaced. But there is a large selection of drought-tolerant perennials that can live for many years and offer plenty of beautiful color.
- 2. Eliminate lawn.** 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.** Many lawn mowers have a recycling feature that allows you to mow without a bagging the clippings. Lawn clippings contain water and nutrients that can benefit your lawn. The result is a need for less water and 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.
- 5. Cut back on water.** Reduce your watering schedule to the bare minimum required to keep the yard and garden healthy. Overwatering 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 them – as well as 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 all-together.
- 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 overfertilizing expensive and time-consuming, it can also require more water and cause excessive growth resulting in increased maintenance needs. An over-abundance of nitrogen and other fertilizer ingredients can also readily kill the plant material on which it was applied.

