



What is Sustainable Landscaping?

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“Sustainable” seems to be the latest buzzword in disciplines ranging from natural resource conservation and agricultural practices to business strategies and land use planning. It sometimes comes with a lot of political baggage and different groups use the term to mean different things.

There doesn't seem to be one clear, commonly accepted definition. A Google search came up with quite a variety, from the very simple:

“Being able to continue into the future.”
to the environmentally focused:

“Capable of being maintained at a steady level without exhausting natural resources or causing severe ecological damage.”

and a more sociologically based:

“Living in a way that meets the needs and goals of people today, without affecting the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

But the more well-rounded definitions address both environmental concerns *and* human standards of living and economic viability, currently and into the future. Wikipedia's definition is:

“Sustainability is an attempt to provide the best outcomes for the human and natural environments both now and into the indefinite future. It relates to the continuity of economic, social, institutional and environmental aspects of human society, as well as the non-human environment. It is intended to be a means of configuring civilization and human activity so that society, its members and its economies are able to meet their needs and express their greatest potential in the present, while preserving biodiversity and natural ecosystems, and planning and acting for the ability to maintain these ideals in a very long term.”

However you define sustainability, the concept is a timely one that is becoming more and more main-stream. Many of the concepts align with what the Master Gardeners teach:

Integrated Pest Management

- Least-toxic methods for weed and pest control
- Human and environmental health and safety by proper application of chemicals when needed.
- Protection of water quality
- Awareness and protection of beneficials

Nurturing Soil through Composting

- Natural fertilizer/amendment
- Optimization of soil structure for retention of soil moisture and making nutrients more available
- On-site recycling of plant matter, reducing amount of waste to landfill

Appropriate Plant Selection (right plant—right place)

- Locally adapted plants require less water and are healthier, requiring less chemical input
- Plants sized to their site require less pruning, reducing waste to the landfill,

Water Conservation

- Use mulch and compost
- Irrigate for soil type, plant need and climate
- Monitor, maintain and manage irrigation systems

Growing Your Own Fruits and Vegetables

- Health benefits: exercise and vitamins
- Eating locally grown food reduces transportation fuel use and air pollution

Other tenets of sustainability tie into gardening practices, and therefore should be considered:

Choice of Hardscaping Materials

- Pervious concrete to avoid runoff and erosion while allowing for groundwater recharge
- Use of recycled or salvaged materials

Energy Conservation

- Planting shade trees to reduce cooling costs
- Choosing landscapes that require less pruning, mowing, blowing and use of power equipment

Protection and/or Creation of Wildlife Habitat

- Use of native plants and biodiverse plantings
- Providing shelter and migration corridors
- Avoiding pesticide use