

Design Your Yard Naturally!

By Doug Rice, Cohost: Yard Talk TV Show

FIRST: Start at the end. Know what you want and work towards your goal. How much maintenance do you want to do? How do you want to enjoy your yard? Do you want to keep your kids, pets and environment free from pesticides, fertilizers, and yard generated pollution?

Use the five steps of Natural Yard Care to get started:

1. Build Healthy Soil

- Soil is everything
- Consider soil renovation as part of the plan
- Even grass needs deep soil
- Improve from the top down

Mulch (with leaves, chipped wood, compost sawdust, grass clippings, hay)

- Shades the soil
- Feeds the soil
- Holds in moisture
- Minimizes soil compaction due to rainfall
- Smothers weeds
- Ensures success

2. Plant right for your site

- Group plants according to soil and micro climate
- Pick plants that resist pests and use less water
- Consider natives and Mediterranean plants
- Consider eliminating or shrinking lawns

3. Practice smart watering

- Follow one inch water per week rule
- Some shade saves water
- Slopes require water--or drought tolerant plants
- Only use a professional to design irrigation systems
- Make use of the rain (rain gardens, rain barrels)
- Group plants by their water needs; dry with dry, wet with wet

4. Avoid the need for pesticides

- Follow all the other steps—likely not to need any dangerous pesticides
- Proper food and water strengthens the natural defense of plants themselves
- Unsure? Call the Natural Lawn and Garden Hotline: 206-633-0224

Realize the Rebound Effect

- Spraying can kill good bugs
- Without beneficial insects, the bad guys take over
- Spraying = super bugs
- No spray, no guilt

5. Practice Natural Lawn Care

- Have a purpose for the lawn: recreation, path, view corridor, dog run, open space
- Follow nature, leave the grass clippings on the lawn to help fertilize naturally.
- Use premium NW mix grass seed with mostly rye and fescue—no bluegrass
- Lawns don't "frame" a house, only larger plants do that.

Treat your lawn right:

- Provide deep soil
- Full sun—no shade
- No slopes
- Good drainage through the existing soil
- Correct water and slow release fertilizer in September

Benefits of Natural Design:

- Healthier plants
- Lower costs
- Less maintenance
- Less chemical runoff
- More time

Before you start designing perform a site analysis:

- Site analysis (climate, wet sunny or wet shady or dry sunny, etc. slopes, gullies, soil types: clay, sand, loam, silt, layered; acidic or alkaline, compacted or loose, plants to keep or not, windy?)
- Research (pictures, ideas, tours, classes, nurseries)
- Clear (ivy, invasive weeds, useless lawn)
- Clean (gutters, drains, yard)
Eliminate (trash, unwanted plants, prune)
- Repair (damaged fences, pavement, trees)
- Replace (missing plants, bare spots)

Design is a process:

Gather good ideas, look around, attend garden tours, ask others, sketch a plan. If you have a plan, your project will tend to happen. Without a plan, your project will tend not to happen!

Design Tips:

- Draw in place: hose, rope, twine, bamboo sticks, tape, height supports, people as trees
- Several heads are better than one
- Copy! Use recipes gathered from books and visits to gardens
- Create a plan=task list

Creating Beautiful spaces:

- Outdoor rooms. Keep them intimate
- Path as Journey; grass as path and corridor
- Focal points, depth, views, and wide, clear entries
- Always have a “tree of refuge” and entry guardians
- Keep materials simple
- Provide rich combinations
- Vary plants with large, medium, and small scales
- Keep more cultivated areas close to house and less cultivated, farther away
- Provide planted layers from outer to inner

Want to know more: Natural Lawn and Garden Hotline: 206-633-0224 and NaturalYardCare.info/
Northwest Native Plant Landscaping Guide: <http://dnr.kingcounty.gov/GoNative/>
Yard Talk; Dirt Simple Techniques for Natural Yard Care <http://dnr.kingcounty.gov/yardtalk>
Yard and garden: dnr.kingcounty.gov/topics/yard-and-garden
Soil and composting: www.kingcounty.gov/soils