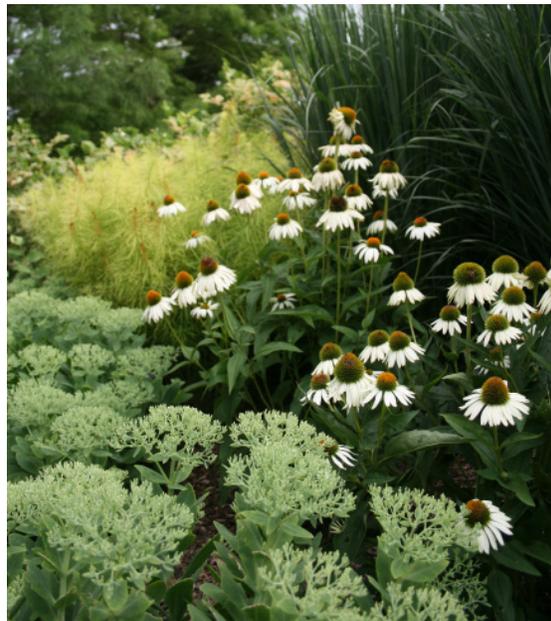


Six Tips for Drought-tolerant Landscapes

Written by Justin Evertson

There are a few things we can do that, if implemented, will strengthen our landscapes against periodic, seasonal drought and, more importantly, against prolonged weather extremes:

1. Pick the right plants for the landscape—and think native plants! There are many, many drought-tolerant trees, shrubs, perennials and grasses that can be selected. Some of the best are our regionally native plants. Use more of those!
2. Don't scatter trees or landscape plants across a landscape. Instead, plant trees and shrubs together in complementary groups and use them as anchors for additional landscape plantings—including perennials and ornamental grasses. Mulch them in mass and you'll have a grouping of plants that are much easier to manage and have similar irrigation requirements.



3. Mulch around trees and shrubs—and mulch landscape plantings into larger beds separated from turf zones.
4. Limit the use of high-input turf grass to where it is truly needed—and begin converting parts of the lawn to more drought-tolerant species. Lawn development and care is a mindset: our vision should not be an emerald green carpet of turf rolling unimpeded across a community, but rather pockets of constant greenness where they make sense—where picnics, sports or other summer activities will happen. Otherwise plan for most turf grass areas to be compatible with summer brownness.
5. Think healthy soil! The more organic and biodiverse a soil is, the more drought-tolerant it is. Organic soils absorb and retain moisture better. A healthy landscape begins with healthy soils.

Top photo by Steve Rodie. A naturalized drainage swale in this residential development near Chicago drastically reduces both mowing and stormwater runoff.

Photo far left: Grouping trees and shrubs makes them easier to manage and is ultimately healthier for them.

Photo opposite: Closely spaced grasses and perennials can limit the need for weeding and watering.

6. Design irrigation systems wisely—and manage them wisely! Irrigation systems can be a good tool for landscape care, but they are also a significant waste of drinking water. There is no law that says an irrigation system should run every day or every other day. Irrigation systems should be seen as supplemental sources of water, not the primary source of water. We have a LONG way to go in this regard.

