

Landscape Design

Many desert dwellers don't realize how easy it is to have a beautiful landscape without water-thirsty grass, trees and shrubs. Many times they opt for a rock and cactus garden – or worse, no landscaping at all. But you don't need to use a lot of water to achieve an attractive landscape and you don't need to spend your weekends pruning and mowing. Here are a few tips for a beautiful, low maintenance, low-water use landscape from Maggie with Sweetwater Landscape Design.

Select plants that are appropriate for your neighborhood.

There is a wide variety of gorgeous landscaping plants that will heartily stand up to our blazing summers and freezing winter nights. It's easy to find plants that are drought tolerant in Tucson. The challenge is in finding plants that won't freeze in the winter time. Depending on where you live in town, you'll need to make sure that your plantings can stand the low winter temperatures. It seems counterintuitive, but many low-lying areas in town – such as areas around washes – get especially cold on freezing winter nights. And many plants that seem to thrive in other parts of town just won't be able to take below-freezing temperatures in these areas. So keep that in mind when choosing plants. Find a nursery that's close to your home. Local nurseries often have staff on hand to answer questions and help you choose the plants that are just right for your neighborhood.

Here are some of my favorite low-water use plants that do well in the desert, are heat and cold tolerant, and will give you plenty of foliage and color.

Trees – Sweet Acacia, Shoestring Acacia, Palo Blanco, Desert Museum Palo Verde, Desert Willow, Texas Honey Mesquite, Palo Brea.

Shrubs – Woolly Butterfly Bush, Pink Fairy Duster, Little Leaf Cordia, Hopbush, Turpentine Bush, Texas Ranger, Green Feathery Senna, Mexican Bird of Paradise.

Vines – Lilac Vine, Cat Claw Vine, Carolina Jasmine.

Cacti and Succulents – Purple Prickly Pear, Golden Barrel Cactus, Parry's Agave, Octopus Agave, Weber's Agave, Yellow Bulbine, Grass Tree, Candelilla, Giant Hesperaloe, Bear Grass

Grasses (careful to only plant non-invasive grasses) – Regal Mist, Deer Grass,

Ground Cover – Trailing Acacia, Gopher Plant, Trailing Rosemary, Gazania, Mexican Primrose.

Perennials – Desert Marigold, all varieties of Penstemon, Paperflower, Chaparral Sage, Globe Mallow, Autumn Sage (salvia greggii)

Install an irrigation system.

Even if you're planting low- or no-water use plants, a good multi-zone irrigation system is a must in the desert. A few scorching hot days without rain or water can kill off even the most drought tolerant plants. You spend a lot of money and time installing a great landscape - think of irrigation as a relatively low cost way to protect that investment. Believe it or not, a drip irrigation system is the most efficient way to water your landscape. A slow drip will water your plants more deeply and minimize evaporation compared to watering with a hose. Also, an irrigation system allows you to control exactly how much water your plants are receiving and make adjustments based on the time of year: less water in the winter, more in the summer, less during the monsoon season. It's tempting to turn your drip system off in the winter, but it's important to keep watering during the cold months. Most plants go dormant in the winter, but their root systems continue to grow. Watering in the winter will give you more growth in the spring and will help your plants fend off frost damage.

Think about color

Even if you've got a super low-water use rock-and-cactus landscape, you can add lush pops of color with well-planted pots of flowers. Mix tall, spiky shapes (like a Fortnight Lily) with bursts of color (like salvia greggii) and a trailing vine to spill over the edge of your pot (try Asparagus Fern or Sweet Potato Vine.) And if you like to putter, pots give you the opportunity to change out your flowers with the change in season. Ask your neighborhood nursery about which flowers grow well in which season. Begin planting now for fall and winter.

When choosing flowers, consider which colors go best together. Check out a color wheel – you can find them easily on the internet – and group flowers with complimentary colors (those that are across from each other on the color wheel, such as yellow and purple) or “analogous” colors (those that are next to each other on the color wheel, like yellow and orange). And keep in mind that flowers aren't the only plants that provide great color! Sweet potato vines, for example, come in beautiful bright green and deep purple shades.

Consider artificial grass

The variety of artificial grasses available on the market has grown considerably in recent years, and artificial turf is looking more realistic than ever. The advantages are pretty obvious: Artificial grass is low maintenance (no mowing, over-seeding, or fertilizing,) uses no water, stands up to abuse from kids and pets, and is green year-round.

To find out how Sweetwater Landscape Design can be of service to you, please visit their website at www.sweetwaterlandscapedesign.com.

La Cholla Landscaping is a full service landscape contractor meeting all of your installation, tree and maintenance needs. Because we're experienced in maintenance as well, we can offer advice on low maintenance type plants. To view any of the above mentioned plants, please visit our website where you'll find full color photos with all of the information you'll need to know about potential plants. You'll even find seasonal watering guidelines.

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