Green Acres Gardening e-Tips

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Table of Contents

[6 Steps to Turn Clay Soils into “Black Gold” 3](#_Toc312944405)

[Create Negative ions for your Health 6](#_Toc312944406)

[Automatic Irrigation: The Key to Protecting Your Landscape 7](#_Toc312944407)

[Drip Irrigation = Big Water Savings! 9](#_Toc312944408)

[Professional Landscape = BIG Results 11](#_Toc312944410)

[Increase Your Home’s Value with a Professional Landscape 13](#_Toc312944411)

[Rockin’ Rock Gardens 15](#_Toc312944412)

[Five Best Palm Trees 16](#_Toc312944413)

[Plant Trees and get a 1,000% return in 4 years 18](#_Toc312944414)

[Do you have Acid in your Soil? 19](#_Toc312944416)

[Japanese Zen Garden 20](#_Toc312944417)

[Courtyard Gardens 22](#_Toc312944418)

[Fertilize your Plants 24](#_Toc312944419)

[How to Design a New Landscape 25](#_Toc312944420)

[Mulch Basics 26](#_Toc312944421)

[Water-Wise Landscaping 28](#_Toc312944422)

[The Garden is good for your Health 29](#_Toc312944423)

[Spring Lawn Care 30](#_Toc312944424)

[Night Blooming Garden 32](#_Toc312944425)

[Water Gardens 34](#_Toc312944426)

[10 Tips for planting a butterfly garden. 35](#_Toc312944427)

[Eco-Friendly Outdoor Spaces 37](#_Toc312944428)

[Tips for Managing Weeds in Turfgrass 38](#_Toc312944429)

[Curb Appeal 40](#_Toc312944430)

[Container Garden 41](#_Toc312944431)

[Earth Day 43](#_Toc312944432)

[7 Tips for Water Wise Landscaping 45](#_Toc312944433)

[Balcony Plants 46](#_Toc312944434)

[Grow Your Own Fresh Air 47](#_Toc312944435)

# http://www.arizonagoldadventures.com/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderpictures/p93.jpg[6 Steps to Turn Clay Soils into “Black Gold”](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/fresh-air/6-steps-to-turn-clay-soils-into-black-gold/)

Soils in southern California are predominately clay. Great for making pottery however terrible for supporting plant life. Because of its small particle size, clay becomes easily compacted, and thus drains slowly or not at all. Also, clay soils prevent air from reaching the roots, which slows plant growth and retards microorganism growth.

Recipe for “Black Gold”  
Prepare the planting hole by adding a teaspoon of bugs, a handful of 2,000 year old moss, and some decomposed plants and animals. Nothing is more important than soil preparation to ensure that your plants and trees take-off like a rocket and remain healthy throughout their life cycles. By careful preparation of the planting holes it is possible to create a perfect growing environment for plants and trees.

The goal is to break up and loosen earth that has become compacted. Replenish it with un-compacted soil rich in minerals, nutrients, and superior water holding capacity.

The 6 part recipe for “Black Gold”:  
1. Add Gypsum for Drainage:   
Most all of southern California has soils high in clay. These soils do not drain well and are high in alkalinity. Clay soils are tiny mineral particles that are less than 0.002 millimeters in size and have an electric charge that is negative. The negative charge makes positively charged minerals like iron, phosphorus, and potassium stick to them. This sticky nature makes clay soils high in mineral content.

The problem with too much clay in the soil is excess sodium. Sodium in clay acts like glue, binding particles together and inhibiting water flow. In addition because clay particles have an electric charge, they act like a magnet pulling the particles together via a strong magnetic bond. These sticky, bonded particles keep water from draining.

Clay soils need gypsum at installation, and every two years thereafter. Best to put gypsum in the bottom of each planting hole and work it into the soil on the bottom of the hole before planting. Adding gypsum to clay soils results is a chemical exchange. The gypsum releases calcium which takes the place of the bonded sodium stuck to the clay particles. This process loosens the soil by breaking apart theses tightly bonded particles.

2. Add Peat Moss amendment:   
Peat moss is a natural, organic soil enhancer that has several benefits which include:

Water Absorption: Peat moss swells to 20 times its weight in water and then slowly releases its stored water to plant roots. This allows plants to have a steady supply of water over a longer period of time, resulting in reduced water usage.

Reduced Mineral Leaching: Peat moss reduces the amount of nutrients which bypass the root zone. The Peat Moss amended soil retains water and nutrients within reach of the roots, reducing the need for excess fertilizer.

3. Add Humus amendment:   
Humus gives the soil the ability to absorb and retain moisture. Such soils do not dry out and require significantly less irrigation. Humus also provides a reservoir for the plant nutrients available to the roots system.

Humus plays a part in supporting soil bacteria, such as rhizobacteria and mycorrhizae. This bacteria is important in forming a symbiotic relationship with host plants and are an important factor in the soil food web.

4. Add some Tiny-Tiny Bugs:   
Healthy soils provide an ideal environment for growing microorganisms. Most microorganism and plant roots are concentrated in the first couple feet of soil. Microorganisms need air, water, and food in order to thrive. Soil bacteria are the most abundant microorganism in the top soil layers. Bacteria are responsible for the breakdown of organic matter and minerals into forms which plants can use.

Mycorrhizae is a fungus which forms a symbiotic relationship with plant roots. Plant roots infected with mycorrhizae devote 15% of the plants energy to feed the fungus. In return the plant roots are better able to absorb phosphorous. Phosphorous helps fight plant diseases, promotes rapid root growth, improves water uptake to the roots, aids in blooming and fruiting, and improves nitrogen uptake from applied fertilizers.

Mycorrhizae infected plant roots are better able to absorb water making the plant more drought resistance. In addition roots are better able to absorb micronutrients such as zinc and copper. Infected roots have a longer lifespan than uninfected roots resulting in an overall increase in root density. Adding Mycorrhizae spores to the soil medium will have a huge affect on plant health and growth.

5. Make sure soil has proper aeration:   
Clay soils are highly compacted limiting gas exchange between roots, microorganisms and the atmosphere. Good soil aeration allows the exchange of gasses between roots, microorganisms and the atmosphere.

As water drains from large macro-pours to micro-pours it creates a sucking vacuum which pulls atmospheric gasses from the surface into said macro-pours. This gives roots and beneficial microorganisms a reservoir of water and air to use as needed.

Roots and soil microorganisms need the proper balance oxygen and water to thrive. As soil amendments are added it is important not to over compact the soil medium. Over compaction leads to reduced macro-pour density and thus reduced gas exchange with the atmosphere.

6. Add a layer of surface Mulch:   
A top layer of mulch insulates the underlying soil and helps to moderate soil temperature. It keeps surface temperature cool on hot days and warmer on chilly nights. As the mulch breaks down it is minerals are carried into the underlying soil, feeding the roots and microorganisms. A continuous top dressing of organic matter and mulch promotes the healthy benefits of worm’s castings and nematode burrowing through the amended areas.

# http://altered-states.net/barry/update298/Negative-Ion.gif[Create Negative ions for your Health](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/fresh-air/206/)

Imagine listening to the tranquil bubbling of a waterfall and watching the peaceful play of light and shadows created by the rippling water and aquatic plants bordering your backyard pond. The peaceful, serene feeling created by the sound of bubbling water does more than relax and relieve stress; water features and natural landscapes have been studied extensively for their effects on the human psyche. According to research published in the Journal of Environmental Psychology, Richard Ryan, a professor of psychology at the University of Rochester, found that test subjects felt more alive and energized when exposed to natural environments for 20 minutes a day. The study revealed subjects could increase vitality and vigor by looking out at natural landscapes or imagining themselves in a natural situation. Similar studies from the United Kingdom found participants living near parks and woodlands with water features enjoyed better health and a longer lifespan compared to their counterparts who did have access to the same natural landscape features.

While the West is only beginning to understand the benefits of water, its power has been known in the East for centuries. Through science, process of ionization and the structure of negative ions in widely understood; running water creates a unique effect known as negative ionization. Every time a drop of water splashes and breaks apart, the atomic structure changes to incorporate more negatively charged electrons. The effect of negative ions in water splashes is particularly noticeable near natural waterfalls and large fountains, where the air feels and smells clean, cool, and fresh. Negative ionization is used in home air purifiers for removing carbon dioxide and pollutants from the indoor air and promoting healthy oxygenation. For thousands of years, the Ancient Chinese have recognized chi as the universal life force found in all living things. According to Chinese principles, chi or life force in generated by water, food, and air. For centuries, fountains, koi ponds, and water features have been regarded as essential elements in the Feng Shui where water features are strategically placed to improve the flow of chi and positive energy.

By releasing clouds of negatively charged ions that purify the air, backyard ponds and waterfalls create a relaxed stress-free atmosphere that feels miles away from the day’s troubles. Indoor tabletop fountains and white noise machines attempt to replicate the soothing effects of fountains and waterfalls, but they are poor replacements for the natural ambiance of a private backyard hideaway with its own secluded koi pond and waterfall. Visitors and family will delight in searching for the eye-catching shimmer of the golden-scaled koi that inhabit your pond.

Backyard ponds and pondless waterfalls are a great way to make a high-impact statement in a small area. The professional design service and installation crew at Green Acres will work with you through every step of the process to create your own special oasis with a tropical or exotic flair. Ponds can be added to nearly any area of the landscape, including cramped corners, awkward slopes, and isolated strips of land cut off by walkways. Install a custom pond or waterfall to create your own private backyard oasis that melts stress away and benefits the health.

# [Automatic Irrigation: The Key to Protecting Your Landscape](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/fresh-air/automatic-irrigation-the-key-to-protecting-your-landscape/)

[](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/timer.jpg)Installing an automatic irrigation system is the single most important thing homeowners can do to backup their investment in landscape improvements. With consistent irrigation, landscape plants grow larger, healthier, and more resistant to drought and disease. Today’s high-tech drip irrigation systems sense water needs and deliver precisely measured amounts of water directly to the root zone of growing plants. In a disaster scenario, an irrigated lawn and landscape can create a living barrier that protects you, your family, and your home from advancing wildfires. Throughout the year, automatic landscape irrigation systems will keep your lawn and landscape healthy and green.

Professionally installed drip irrigation systems simulate the natural water table by delivering water directly to the subterranean root zone. Regulated drips of water are targeted directly at the roots of growing plants to keep pests, insects, and aboveground fungal diseases to a minimum. In addition to improving plant health, drip irrigation reduces the number of unwanted plants and weeds that invade landscape beds. With sensors that detect moisture needs, plants consistently receive the right amount of water. Drip irrigation ensures your lawn and landscape will always be lush and green, and you’ll never lose another plant to over watering, under watering or inconsistent soil moisture.

Drip irrigation systems with adjustable moisture sensors transport water directly to plants with zero waste. Additional features for distributing lawn chemicals and fertilizer can be incorporated into irrigation systems to minimize regular maintenance. The professional design and installation team at Green Acres is trained to construction drip irrigation systems tailored to meet the moisture requirements of individual landscape areas. Depending on plant requirements, sensors can be programmed to deliver water in varying quantities and frequencies. Moisture sensors deliver exact amounts of water based on moisture requirements affected by plant type, soil drainage, and sun exposure. Even in windy areas, drip irrigation effectively eliminates waste from overspray and surface evaporation.

According to water use statistics, low-flow drip irrigation systems are 30 to 50% more efficient compared to high-pressure sprinkler systems. Because drip irrigation systems use smaller pipes than high-pressure sprinkler systems, the installation process is less invasive. In most cases, sod can be carefully removed and replaced to ensure seamless, non-invasive construction and a flawless lawn. Small-scale installations can be completed in as little as one day and larger systems can be done in less than a week. All irrigation systems installed by Green Acres are constructed with high-quality parts, including pumps, filters, ball valves, and other components, to provide years of reliable service.

With drip irrigation, water, fertilizer, and lawn chemicals are safely introduced underground, so water is never wasted and pollutants never enter the municipal water supply. Drip irrigation systems are so efficient they are often exempt from water restrictions and seasonal ordinances on irrigation implemented during prolonged drought. Investing in a professionally installed irrigation system is investing in the future health of your landscape and prized specimens. Without proper maintenance and irrigation, investments in landscape material will eventually deteriorate. Consistent moisture from an automatic irrigation system ensures your care-free landscape always looks its best with as little maintenance as possible.

# <http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/drip-irrigation.jpg>[Drip Irrigation = Big Water Savings!](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/fresh-air/drip-irrigation-big-water-savings/)

**﻿﻿**Lower Your Water Bill with Drip Irrigation  
Irrigating systems have been used since the dawn of civilization. The Mesopotamians, Egyptians, and Aztecs developed their own complex methods for delivering water to their vital crops and edible plants. Fortunately, modern irrigation systems don’t require a massive waterwheel and team of oxen to operate. Today’s modern drip irrigation systems are more efficient than ever before.

Over the past century, the agriculture industry has perfected irrigation systems through many high-tech innovations like soil moisture sensors, micro sprayers, and fertilizer injectors. Some of the first drip irrigation systems were used by the Ancient Romans. In arid regions, the Ancient Romans buried water-filled, earthen vessels in their fields to slowly transfer water to the roots of growing crops. Today’s drip irrigation systems transport water and fertilizer directly to the roots of trees, shrubs, and other landscape plants though a series of underground pipes and drip emitters.

According to the Alliance for Water Efficiency, the efficiency of drip irrigation systems is near 100% making drip irrigation the most effective and environmentally-friendly method of landscape irrigation. With aboveground irrigation, the average efficiency is between 50% and 70%. Traditional rotating sprinklers and pop-up irrigation systems lose approximately 30% of their total output through evaporation and off-target overspray. Studies on water consumption show drip systems can reduce water use by 50 gallons per plant each month, which results in tremendous water savings of the course of a season. For homeowners, this means lower water bills and a trouble-free landscape that always looks its best.

Drip irrigation systems also reduce the prevalence of weeds, insect damage, and foliar diseases. Overhead irrigation soaks plant foliage creating the ideal environment for mildew and fungal diseases. Insects are also attracted to the tiny puddles of excess water left behind by overhead irrigation; drip irrigation eliminates many insect problems by making the aboveground environment dry and inhospitable. By delivering water directly to the root zone of target plants, drip irrigation dramatically reduces the number of weeds that sprout between plants. Although supplemental water is one of the essential elements for a lush, green lawn, excess surface moisture creates an environment prone to beetles, grubs, webworms, and other lawn pests. Drip irrigation keeps the lawn and landscape healthy by delivering the right amount of water to each part of the landscape.

Irrigation professionals will work with you to design and build a concealed drip irrigation system that only delivers water where and when necessary. Individual soil moisture sensors automatically shut off drip emitters after rainfall or when soil is sufficiently moist. In addition to adjustable moisture sensors, emitters are installed as needed around the lawn and major landscape plantings. Automatic drip irrigation systems with integrated timers and moisture sensors insure your plants always receive the correct amount of water for worry-free landscape maintenance all year.

With professionally installed drip irrigation systems, you are guaranteed a high-quality irrigation system from the emitters and vales to the pump and filter. After installation, Green Acres clients receive full support for seasonal maintenance, repairs, and replacement parts. Investing in professional installation is investing in the future of your irrigation system and your landscape plants. A well-designed and maintained irrigation system will provide you with years of trouble-free service and a lush landscape all year long.

# [http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/trellis3-300x238.jpg](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/trellis3.jpg)[Professional Landscape = BIG Results](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/fresh-air/professional-landscape-big-results/)

In as little one month, you can be enjoying a brand-new, professionally installed front yard landscape and backyard retreat. Backyard decks and DIY landscape projects can languish for years in various states of completion. With professional installation, your landscape or hardscape project will be done quickly and done right. As nursery, design group and installation company, Green Acres completes projects with competitive pricing and greater efficiency. Depending on your timeline, landscape and hardscape projects can be completed in less than four weeks from the initial consultation to project completion. If you’re getting ready to sell your property, the Green Acres design and installation team can quickly and effectively transform your landscape and bring out your homes curb appeal.

With professional landscape installation from a large nursery like Green Acres, you have access to a large selection of locally adapted plants that are guaranteed to grow. Before planting, installers prepare soil for improved drainage and superior plant growth. Knowledgeable professionals remove attachments and properly prepare ball in burlap trees for unrestricted growth. With access to dedicated heavy equipment, professional landscape installers can deliver and plants, high-quality trees, large specimens, and mature landscape plants. Using boom trucks, installation teams can plant 30-foot palms in cramped spaces and compact courtyards. Installers can also use backhoes for digging, grading, and manipulating the natural terrain.

Professional landscape installers specialize in delivering materials and constructing custom landscape and hardscape features. Raking and distributing topsoil and mulch is tiresome work especially after a day at the office. With professional landscape installers, you can have mulch or topsoil delivered and applied in one day. Working with a dual supplier and installer, homeowners can have pavers, bricks, Belgium blocks, slate, natural river rocks, and supplemental items delivered directly to the property or construction site. Green Acres offers no-hassle delivery options for sod, topsoil, gravel, mulch, and many other landscape materials.

To keep your lawn and landscape looking its best, professionals at Green Acres also install irrigation systems, landscape lighting, and many secondary features that enhance overall appeal and bring together the finishing touches for a flawless landscape design. Irrigation and low-voltage landscape lighting systems can both be installed with minimal impact and non-invasive construction techniques. In most cases, sod can be replaced for seamless installation without reseeding. If necessary, professional installation teams touchup any areas disturbed by equipment or installation.

Investing in professional landscape installation services ensures your vision is executed by trained professional with no back-breaking labor necessary. For easy installation and flawless results, consult landscape professionals at Green Acres who will help create a customized plan based on your specifications. Working with a professional installation team will turn your vision into reality. Homeowners who invest in professionally installed landscaping benefit from increased home value, faster selling-time, and a more enjoyable and functional outdoor space.

# <http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Designed-Landscape5.jpg>[Increase Your Home’s Value with a Professional Landscape](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/fresh-air/increase-your-homes-value-with-a-professional-landscape/)

Adding professionally designed landscaping can turn an ordinary suburban property into an extraordinary gem. When done correctly, landscaping can complete a look, increase home value, and dramatically transform an average backyard into a spectacular hideaway. Investing in a professionally prepared landscape design ensures customer satisfaction and guarantees years of enjoyment. With assistance from professional landscape designers, simple changes to plantings and hardscape features can boost curb appeal and capture that unmistakable wow factor.

One of the keys for selling homes in a buyer’s market is increasing curb appeal by installing and maintaining above average landscaping. Simple upgrades that elevate existing landscaping from average to above average can increase home value by 15%. According to industry statistics, 99% of realtors see landscaping is a universal selling point that increases a home’s appeal for prospective buyers. Investing in landscaping before selling a home can result in a faster selling time and a higher sale price compared to homes with minimal or average landscaping. By working with trained professionals, you can benefit from years of industry experience and avoid costly mistakes and pitfalls homeowners face while completing landscape projects on their own. Green Acres designers will work with you to select locally adapted plants that are proven to thrive in diverse climatic conditions.

Designers can create low-maintenance, drought tolerant, and xeric landscape designs to suit any budget and style. Landscape plans can include integrated patios, walkways, retaining walls, and other hardscape features that add to property value and increase usable outdoor space. Plantings can be designed to complement existing features, such as courtyards, patios, swimming pools and other outdoor focal points. Raised beds, berms, and living privacy screens add dimension and texture while creating a secluded environment in a suburban or urban environment.

Even if you’ve never owned a yard before, Green Acres can work with you to identify your needs, select appropriate plants, and answer any questions you might have about care and maintenance. Professionally designed landscapes can include an enormous variety of walkways and hardscape features that enhance the natural look of your home and property. Depending on your budget and needs, you landscape design may also include integrated low-voltage landscape lighting to bring out the best features of your home and landscape while increasing property security. Working with landscape designers and the professional installation team at Green Acres will give you the superior results you need to sell your property quickly in a competitive real estate market and increase home value by 15%. With a professionally prepared landscape design, homeowners can double their landscape investment in increased home value at the time of sale.

Landscape improvements are one of the most effective improvements homeowners can make; bathroom renovations and kitchen makeovers are costly with homeowners recovering only 50% to 75% of the original installation cost. On the other hand, a professionally designed landscape can yield a 150% to 200% return on investment. With a $10,000 landscape budget, a homeowner in a $200,000 home can gain a 200% return on their investment by selling the home for the increased price of $220,000. Patios, outdoor living rooms, and other permanent landscape features increase marketability and make your backyard a great place to hang-out with family and friends.

# [http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/rock_garden1-300x289.jpg](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/rock_garden1.jpg)[Rockin’ Rock Gardens](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/fresh-air/rockin%e2%80%99-rock-gardens/)

Rock features are some of the world’s most striking natural wonders. But when Chimney Rock is in the backyard it’s not so inspiring. Mountain tops and rocky glades produce some of the most amazing specimens, from weather-beaten junipers to tiny alpine flowers that the mountain top climate has evolved some incredibly unique plants. Alpine plants love rugged conditions and infertile soil, making them the best choices for rock gardens or converting an uneven outcropping into an attractive landscape.

Natural rock formations are all unique but they do follow certain rules. Rocks are never randomly placed, they are consistent geological features formed by the continuous movement of glaciers. Round rocks are usually river rocks that have been smoothed by water. Alpine and cliff rocks are more angular. Find cubes and natural slabs that can be buried so it looks like they are naturally protruding from the ground. Use local stone whenever possible, to blend with the landscape. Study local rock formations, noting the grain of the rocks, positioning of cracked segments, and mixture sizes. Mimicking nature when placing rocks and choosing plants will make the most effective rock garden.

The first step when planning a rock garden should be to consider the logistics of importing tons, literally, tons, of rocks that must be delivered, then moved into place individually, while considering the placement of the rocks in relation to each other. Move very large boulders with a forklift. Always talk to a professional about the logistics of your property before committing to a project.

When planning the layout of a rock garden, consider the terrain of your property. For level areas it might be necessary to raise-up part of the ground into a berm where the rocks can be buried. Alternatively, rocks can be buried below the ground level imitating a natural outcropping. Properties with a natural slope have a few more options for laying out a rock garden. A hill can be terraced and connected by a meandering rock path or thin slabs can be wedged into a hill, making a natural planter. A slope is also great for giving the rock garden a little bit of shade.

Choose rocks that are large enough to be one-third buried. Rocks need to be stable so the garden can be weeded and maintained. Rocks will naturally move as the soil heaves, so it’s important to have the rocks securely installed or it can be dangerous not only to the plants but to visitors as well. Once the rocks are stable, fill in the cracks and spaces with planting mix, a blend of topsoil, compost and grit, water in the mix, allowing all the nooks and crannies to be filled. Continue adding planting mix until the soil is stable and ready to be planted.

Choose compact plants that are heat and drought tolerant. Compact and prostrate evergreens are excellent choices for trees and shrubs in rock gardens. Mediterranean herbs like lavenders and thymes are excellent choices. Perennials that do well in rock gardens include carex, fescue, dwarf fountain grass, penstemon, verbena, and veronica. Succulents and cacti also do well and include aloes, agaves, euphorbias, sedums, and sempervivums.

# [Five Best Palm Trees](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/fresh-air/five-best-palm-trees/)

**[](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/Butia_capitata.jpg)**Palms are a uniquely tropical group   of exotic plants. Not only are palms symbolic of sandy beaches and vacations, they are diverse family of plants that include compact species and tall trees over 100 feet tall. Fortunately, for homeowners who want that tropical look there are palms that withstand harsh conditions and can fit in any setting. For yards large and small, there are palms for nearly every landscape. Many palms can also be grown in pots for urban dwellers craving a lush oasis.

Butia capitata, the Pindo Palm, is one of the more cold-tolerant of the palms. Although the Pindo palm can withstand occasional frost, it is also drought tolerant. A native to the South American savannahs, the pindo palm is right at home in zones 8 and 9. Pindo palms stay under 20 feet tall and have a relatively compact form, making them an excellent choice for urban landscaping. Pindo palms are suitable for full sun and partial shade. Most pindos retain their dead leaf stalk for years. It’s not uncommon to see pindo palms with their trucks covered entirely with brown leaf stalks. Mature specimens that are regularly pruned tend to have open trucks. Pindo palms are versatile landscaping plants equally effective in groups or as specimens.

Phoenix Roebelenii, or Pigmy Date Palm, resembles the common date palm, but is one tenth the size. Pigmy date palms are extremely popular landscape plants, which are also used in container and indoor plantings. Pigmy date palms are single trunked in nature, but multi-trunk clumps are very popular for landscape specimens. Plants have long slender trucks covered with brown leaf bases. Pigmy date palms are slow growers, eventually reaching 8-10 ft, which makes them great for small spaces.

Trachycarpus fortunei, also called Windmill Palm, Chusan Palm, or Chinese Fan Palm is a native to Southeast Asia. Windmill palms start-off small, but reaches 20-40 feet at maturity. Windmill palms are easy to recognize by their spiraling fronds with circular leaf segments. Plants prefer partial shade and well draining soil, but they are also partially drought tolerant and suitable for growing in pots..  When grown in full sun, plants are more compact. Windmill palms are moderately salt tolerant, if shielded from direct spray. Single specimens and trios of windmill palms in varying heights are two of the most popular arrangements for these landscape plantings.

Washingtonia robusta. or Mexican Fan Palm, is one of the taller landscape palms, towering over other trees at 100 feet tall. Mexican fan lams are popular for formal plantings, groves, boulevards, and large estates. Plants have massive trunks  and the dead fronds form large skirts that must be trimmed by a professional. Mexican fan palms are salt resistant and fast growing, which makes them a good choice for sites in coastal areas.

Syagrus romanzoffianum, or Queen Palm, is a classic boulevard tree. Queen palms are tall and dramatic and about half the size of Mexican fan palms. Queen palms are native to South America and grow up to fifty feet tall. Plants are easy to grow and tolerate to a wide-range of soil conditions. Queen palms are one of the more dramatic landscape palms, suitable for formal or informal groupings. These palms are very fast growers. In a few years they will grown into large landscape features.

# [Plant Trees and get a 1,000% return in 4 years](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/fresh-air/plant-trees-and-get-a-1000-return-in-4-years/)

**[](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/money.jpg)**Trees are a great investment. Trees enhance the landscape and increase the resale value of a property. Landscaping plays a big part in a home appraisals and the sale of a property. A large part of the landscaping value is attributed to the choice and maturity of the trees you have. Reason being, trees get larger and more valuable with time. Take for example a 5 gallon queen palm tree. It will take that Queen Palm an additional 4 years to mature into a nice size tree.. The value added to the property, in the case of the mature Queen Palm, is approximately $800 dollars. Here is a breakdown of costs involved.

**Purchase and Plant a 5 gallon Queen Palm**

* Cost to purchase 5 Gallon Queen Palm = $15
* Cost to plant 5 Gallon Queen Palm = $10
* Cost to deliver 5 gallon Queen Palm = $0
* Cost to water and fertilize for 4 years = $56 ( $14yr x 4yrs)
* Total investment after 4 years = $81

**Purchase and Plant an equivalent Queen Palm**

* Cost to purchase 36” Box Queen Palm = $420
* Cost to plant 36” Box Queen Palm = $350
* Cost to deliver 36” Box Queen Palm = $120
* Total = $810

**$810 / $81 = 1000% return on your investment in just 4 years.**

# [http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Soil-Types-300x225.jpg](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Soil-Types.jpeg)[Do you have Acid in your Soil?](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/fresh-air/do-you-have-acid-in-your-soil/)

Soil chemistry is very complex topic. There are laboratories and advanced college courses dedicated entirely soil science. Knowing the measurements of a few soil components can greatly increase the health of landscape plants and the lawn. When things go seriously wrong with the soil, plants will start to display some symptoms of nutrient deficiency. Potted plants, growing in a limited amount of soil, tend to show deficiencies much more. When grown in the ground, plants also symptoms indicating the soil needs some adjustment.

When there is a problem with the soil chemistry, plants show stunted or abnormal growth. The pH and other factors affect the availability of nutrients. In some cases, elements and micronutrients, including metals, are unavailable to the plants. These type of deficiencies affect the production of chlorophyll. The yellowing of the leaves if typically related to a deficiency.

Knowing the pH and amount of nutrients and metals is valuable in new and established landscapes. In some cases, when moving into an older home it might be beneficial to test for contaminants like arsenic or lead. A basic soil test includes the pH, and possibly the phosphorus and potassium content, which are important nutrients from strong roots and beautiful flowers. Ideally, a full soil test would also include the micronutrients iron, manganese, and zinc.

For most of us, we don’t really know what was on the property before we arrived. To make sure the test is an accurate representation of the soil on-site, collect samples from two to three points around the yard. Take two samples if there’s an indication that topsoil was brought in or there are two areas with different characteristics. To get a good indication of the soil the plants will be growing in, dig a hole about six inches deep that is the levels where the majority of the roots will be growing. Collect soil samples using a clean garden tool. Dig into the side of the hole to collect clean soil for the most accurate analysis. For most yards with native soil, combining the samples from two or three places in the yard will give a good analysis of the general state of the soil. Allow the soil to dry overnight. The next day package a heaping one cup of soil in a zip lock bag for soil testing.

Cooperative extensions all over the country offer soil tests through the mail as do independent laboratories. For preventative care, most common nutrient deficiencies can be prevented with a regular side dressing of humus or compost.

# [Japanese Zen Garden](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/gardening/japanese-zen-garden/)

[](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/zengarden.jpg)Wouldn’t it be great to have one those novelty desktop Zen gardens right outside your window? Japanese Zen gardens are a tradition over seven hundred years old. These gardens are called Karesansui in Japanese, which literally translates to a dry landscape. Like most things Japanese, there is a deep symbolism in all the elements of a Zen garden. The most famous and identifiable Zen garden is at the Ryoanji Temple in Kyoto, which was constructed in the 1400s. The dry landscape at Ryoanji is the quintessential Zen garden, surrounded by mid-height wall with an overhanging roof. The Zen garden at the Ryoanji Temple is easy to recognize by the long and skinny 3:1 rectangular layout.

The key elements in a Zen garden are rocks and chip gravel or sand. Trees are optional. In a dry landscape the rocks becomes little islands of landmass in the sea symbolized by the sand or gravel. The raked patterns in the sand were traditionally made by the Zen priests who managed the temple and used the raking as can exercise in concentration. The beauty of the patterns is they continuously change, symbolizing waves and movement in the water. This element of change is what makes Zen gardens into a living landscape that is never totally finished.

The placement and size of the rocks also has a secondary symbolic meaning. Historically the Zen priests were the only ones who could interpret the secret meaning hidden in the placement and shape of the rocks. Often the largest rock represents the Buddha and the smaller rocks represent his disciples. Other interpretations symbolize the soul, body, and heart.

Although tourists love to walk through and snap pictures, the original purpose of Zen gardens was for meditation. The Buddhist monks would sit in meditation rooms inside the temple viewing the garden in a state of calm. Psychologists have even studied the calming effect of Zen gardens, determining that the subconscious is able to see shapes, like trees, in the stones without being consciously aware. Many Asian landscaping relies on negative space for a calm, clean, and modern landscape.

Constructing a Zen garden is easy. Think of it like a tray or shallow sandbox that is filled with gravel. Although formal Zen gardens rely on rules and historical styles, it’s possible for a home Zen garden to be any shape or size. Zen gardens are almost always on a level site. Fortunately most properties have at least one level spot even if it is near the entrance, or back door. Even the smallest yard has room for an obelisk surrounded by raked limestone.

The first step is to build a perimeter that will contain gravel at a depth of two inches. Bricks and tiles are the most durable, but wood and other landscape edging will work too. Most Japanese Zen gardens use chipped limestone gravel, which is available in different sizes measured in millimeters, sometimes called mils or mm. 8 millimeters is the average size. Smaller chips are more prone to shifting like sand, while larger chips retain raking lines longer.

Choose a variety of rocks to be the central landscape features. In nature there is usually a blend of vertical and horizontal stones of varying height. Look for stones that look similar. A stone that does not fit in will cause disharmony in the garden design. Likewise stones with misshapen features are not desired. Planting a naturally horizontal stone in a vertical position is the ultimate faux-pas in Zen garden, so taboo it is comparable to raising the dead into an upright position. Always display rocks to feature their best sides.

Before adding the gravel material, anchor the rocks by burying them under the ground so the rock looks like it is naturally emerging from the earth. Once the featured rocks are anchored, a top quality long-lasting landscape cloth should be installed to minimize maintenance and prevent weeds from growing in the gravel.

Although it’s not required, additional elements can be added to a Zen garden. Evergreens like the Japanese Black Pine or Mugo pine are acceptable and fit into classic Japanese landscaping. Stone lanterns and other sculptural elements can add to the Zen theme. Finally a small fence or rope perimeter can be added to keep wandering feet and paws out of the garden.

# [http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/courtyard-garden-300x225.jpg](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/courtyard-garden.jpg)[Courtyard Gardens](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/fresh-air/courtyard-gardens-2/)

Courtyards are some of the most private and impressive landscapes. Some homeowners, however, who move into new spaces can feel a bit underwhelmed and unsure how to proceed in small courtyard space limited by confining walls.

To create the most welcoming outdoor room, carefully consider the color of the walls and whether repainting is necessary. Bright colors make spaces feel smaller, while cooler colors like whites, greens, and purples help to open the space up. Courtyards are like a little microclimate. Walls provide shade and a windbreak, but at the same time they make for a hotter and dryer landscape.

Plain courtyard walls are pretty uninspiring. Adding tall plantings, fountains, wall art or hanging pots are all great ways to help soften the look. Palms, nandinas and tropical foliage plants cast beautiful shadows on the courtyard wall, in natural light or with powered splash lights. Taller trees and shrubs planted in the ground or in pots hide corners and add depth to the landscape. They also frame other landscape accents, like a wall sculpture, mural, or water feature. Don’t be afraid to break up a courtyard with a dividing planting. Trees and screen-forming shrubs work great to break up outdoor space, just like open architecture, making each part of the courtyard seem like a private room. Vining plants are another excellent way to cover some of the bare walls. Climbers can be planted in the ground, or in containers, and trained to grow up trellises. Fragrant plants and climbers, like jasmine, are good choices for private courtyards that are used to relax in the evenings. Hang potted plants from the walls for added interest and a classic provincial look like the original courtyards in Europe.

Courtyards can vary from solid patios with no room for planting to patches of shallow soil applied over concrete. The type of surface in the courtyard will largely dictate the way specimens are planted, but not what can be planted. Test the soil depth and drainage by digging a large hole and filling it with water. Shallow soil is suitable for perennials and grasses and some shallow rooted shrubs like manzanitas. If grass is very important, try ornamentals or slow growing grasses like zoysia, the Japanese lawn grass, buffalo grass, or blue grama. Zoysia looks particularly soft and fuzzy when grown over round river rocks.

Many Mediterranean natives and drought-tolerant plants are well-suited for courtyard plantings. Perennials like rosemary, lavenders, penstamons, salvias, veronicas, and verbenas are excellent for a traditional Spanish Mediterranean look. Tropical’s, like palms, ficuses, and cordylines, are great for planting in the ground or in pots. Daylilies, cannas, and elephant ears are excellent and easy to grow choices for seasonal interest. Cacti, cycads, and succulents are also great choices for a courtyard landscape, as long as these prickly plants are planted out of the way.

Even large tropical plants and trees are right at home in containers. Group containers for impact and arrange them to create height and dimension. Walls, steps, and ledges can be transformed into a multi-tired oasis with the addition of a few container plants. For the most versatility, purchase plant stands with heavy duty casters, so plants can easily be rearranged.

# http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-a7i-M2rZaYY/TVkHXEYCdFI/AAAAAAAAAAw/6x2gLJgFRUw/s1600/fertilizer-15101.gif[Fertilize your Plants](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/fresh-air/fertilize-your-plants/)

These are the nutrients that you will see commonly identified on the fertilizer package. Nitrogen, Phosphorous, and Potassium are labeled as a sequence of three numbers (10-10-10) or (20-20-20).

Nitrogen promotes healthy vegetative, green growth. Phosphorous is vital to promote strong root growth and flower production.

Potassium makes sure all is in good working order somewhat like a vitamin. I call it the plants immune system booster as it helps the plant through stressful times such as disease/insect damage, drought and cold temperatures.

Balanced fertilizers have an equal representation of the three major nutrients, for example, 10-10-10. Fertilizers formulated for strong green growth will have a larger percentage of nitrogen. Fertilizers for evergreen trees or turf grasses will have a large percentage of nitrogen, for example, 30-10-10. Fertilizers developed for flower production normally has a high phosphorous content, for example, 10-20-10.In general, stay away from high nitrogen content fertilizers for use with roses.

How you fertilize your roses depends on what stage of the growing process your roses are at. If you are fertilizing newly planted roses you should only use bone meal or super phosphate (*very small amount*) in the planting hole at the time of planting. You certainly do not want to promote a lot of green growth at the expense of a good root system.

Your basic rose feeding program should start out with a balanced fertilizer (10-10-10), or one with a high phosphorous content *(5-10-5,* 10-20-10). Even better are rose fertilizers, which include the other macro and micronutrients.

The secondary macronutrients are sulphur, calcium, and magnesium. Use of a high quality rose fertilizer will ensure that these macronutrients are made available to the roses.

Of these secondary macronutrients, magnesium is of substantial interest to the rose gardener. Magnesium sulfate, provided in the form of Epsom salts, is a time-honored secret for intensifying flower color, increasing flower production, and flushing harmful salts through the soil.

# [How to Design a New Landscape](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/fresh-air/how-to-design-a-new-landscape/)

**[](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/landscape-design.jpg)**For most homeowners, designing a landscape from scratch is an a once in a lifetime opportunity. The typical home landscape is formed by small purchases that are placed here and there in the landscape or wherever there is room. When first getting started, it’s tempting to rush out and buy a whole bunch of plants without planning. A garden is something that is always in progress so doesn’t need to be filled in right away.

Start with a clean slate. If there’s a particular plant that’s not working, remove it right away. For plants with seasonal debris it’s easy to forget about them until the next season when the problem arises once again. Remove problem plants; they won’t go away on their own. Small shrubs can be sawed down and dug out, but bigger plants may need a professional tree trimmer with a stump grinder.

Landscapes are supposed to be attractive as well as functional. To get the most out of the landscape, design around the critical areas. The entry way, backyard, and patio are a few of the most important places. Analyze your family’s needs and wants and look at the property features to see what needs to be emphasized or deemphasized. The typical suburban backyard requires a grassy play area for children and pets and an adult area for entertaining or relaxing on the patio or deck. Each of these areas can be accented with appropriate plants. Depending on the area, plants with berries or large prickly thorns may not be the most family and pet-friendly choices. Screen and hedge plants can be planted around the property for privacy or to shield an unsightly view of the neighbor’s driveway and trash waste station.

Once the list of needs and wants are established, it’s easy to design a functional landscape that improves the land use. Sketching the house and yard is a good way to decide how to break up the yard. The final step of planning a landscape is selecting the plants. Most low-maintenance landscapes are relatively simple with large plantings of a limited number of plants. Planting areas with groups of plants cuts down on the number of tasks required to keep the area maintained. It’s important to have plants of differing heights to add perspective to the viewer. Using a photo or sketch of the home makes it easy to play around with different combinations to see which areas benefit most from the taller elements.

The largest plants will determine how the rest of the landscape lays out. Once the main elements are in place the remaining elements can be worked in between; shrubs and taller perennials followed by the low growing creepers and groundcovers to fill in the spaces. Before planting, consider how big the tree or shrub will grow in three or five years. Many landscape plants grow six inches to a foot every year. Using ample spacing will pay off in the long run with bigger healthier plants.

# [Mulch Basics](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/gardening/111/)

**[](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Mulch1.png)**Mulching is one of the easiest things a home owner can do to simultaneously reduce maintenance to improve aesthetics. Mulching prevents weeds from coming up, reduces evaporation, stops erosions, and insulates the soil in summer and winter. According to the Colorado State University Cooperative Extension, mulch reduces evaporation from the soil surface and reduces irrigation needs by up to 50 percent.

Mulches are generally broken into two types, organic and inorganic. Organic mulches include bark, shredded hardwood, straw, salt hay, leaves, and all natural materials that decompose. Inorganic mulches don’t break down and include gravel, pebbles, shredded tires, plastic weed barriers and landscape cloth. Consider all of the options and pros and cons of each material before purchasing. Plastic weed barriers should only be used when absolutely necessary, since they block water percolation and prevent air flow. Gravel and rock mulches have some benefits and disadvantages too. Unlike plastic, gravel allows water to run through; it also lasts for a very long time and rarely needs replacing. Rock mulches are completely fire-proof. A few disadvantages are the extreme weight of gravel, which makes it difficult to transport and apply. Another disadvantage is the heat that rocks can retain and reflect when used in high heat and sun exposure areas.

Organic mulches are the most environmentally friendly. A lot of the wood and bark used for mulches is harvested from managed plantations. Municipal wood chips are also very environmentally because they are locally made from recycled trees and plant material that your neighbors put out for the chipper. Avoid cypress mulches because they are not sustainably harvested and have a negative impact on the natural cypress stands.

There are a number organic mulches available, from beauty bark to pine bark. Beauty bark is made from fir and hemlock bark naturally dyed red, brown, or black. Medium ground beauty bark is the most popular size, generally recognized by the fluffy consistency with some long shards or shavings of wood. Pine Bark nuggets are another very popular mulch. Large chunks of pine bark are slow to decompose and generally last a year or more. Bark nuggets can be bought in different sizes from small to very large. Pine bark is extremely lightweight, which means it will float away in water erosion zones.

When choosing mulch, consider that coarse mulch takes longer to break down and provides a lot of healthy air circulation. On the other hand, fine mulch retains more moisture and is better at maintaining soil temperature and preventing crusts. Finely textured mulches can also suffocate plants, by inhibiting air circulation, if applied too thickly.

Move mulch away from plants that start yellowing or dropping leaves. This could mean air can’t reach the plant’s roots. These symptoms can also be caused by sour mulch that has remained wet for too long and started to grown harmful organisms that cause an imbalanced pH. Raking mulch improves air circulation and eliminates this condition.

Mulch should be applied 2-4 inches thick; no more. Coarse bark nuggets can be added on the thicker side, but fine mulches should be applied more thinly; 2-3 inches max. Avoid piling mulch over the trunks of trees and shrubs. Ideally there should be several inches in each direction around the trunk before mulch begins. Avoid “mulch volcanoes” typically seen in parking lot medians where there are tall mounds of mulch piled directly up to and surrounding the trunk. This is exactly what not to do when applying mulch. For best results apply mulch thinly to a broad area.

# http://www.smgov.net/uploadedImages/Departments/OSE/Categories/Landscape/grant_gardens/Sustainable_Landscape_Galleries.1.JPG[Water-Wise Landscaping](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/fresh-air/water-wise-landscaping/)

Every gardener has lost at least one plant because it wasn’t watered. If you’re lucky, you might see the wilted plant before it dies, but other times it’s too late and the plant is nothing but dust. Wouldn’t it be wonderful to establish plants and never have to water them again. Seriously, who has the time to check and water their plants every single day? Where hot weather is combined with sandy soil, water retention can be a serious issue. The good news is thousands and thousands of plants have evolved to live and thrive in hot and dry climates.

Plants that have adapted to low water areas often have similar attributes. Succulents and cacti retain water throughout the plant tissue these include sedums, agave, and saguaro.  
Other plants, like lamb’s ears, have developed tiny hairs on their leaves that provide self-shade. Many of these plants hot climate plants, including sages, have silver or grayish foliage that reflects heat. All of these attributes were successful to plants evolving in an arid dessert climate.

Many of the most popular herbs originated in the Mediterranean, growing at their best in warm dry climates. Rosemary, lavender, and thyme are three Mediterranean favorites that available in many diverse forms from creeping prostrates to tall uprights and everything in between.

Many shrubs are well suited for hot and dry conditions and grow regardless of soil condition. Drought-tolerant shrubs include:

Ceanothus ssp., Wild Lilac.  
Cistus ssp., Rock rose.  
Nandina domestica ‘Nana’ Heavenly bamboo.  
Nerium oleander Oleander.  
Pittosporum tobira Japanese pittosporum.  
Rhaphiolepis Indian Hawthorne.

A well planned landscape using region appropriate plants will last longer and cost less to establish and maintain. If you consider things like water use and the cost of replacing a plant, it’s not worth it go against the flow of nature and try to grow what nature didn’t intend. Native plants and wildflowers are some of the best, and most reliable, choices for creating a low-water xeriscape landscape.

# https://encrypted-tbn1.google.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcT4c5IZhM8zEYILCvVEsPgcYMhTj50HtESlvtO8JoH3DTrx55Ch[The Garden is good for your Health](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/fresh-air/the-garden-is-good-for-you-health/)

Next time your garden needs a little weeding, consider this. Just five minutes of outdoor activity improves self-esteem and mental health. Researchers from the University of Essex, in England, extrapolated data from 10 existing studies on outdoor exercise. The data was collected from over 1,200 people of all ages and genders, including people in different states of mental health. The data included studies on horseback riding, bicycling, boating, fishing, walking and, of course, gardening.

The research showed that outdoor activity had the most positive effect on young people and people with mental illness, although it was beneficial for everyone. Most of us know first-hand that outdoor exercise increases the sense of well being, but up until now no one knew exactly how much outdoor time was required for a noticeable effect. The current study published in the Journal of Environmental Science & Technology says the greatest effect on self-esteem was achieved in only 5 minutes of outdoor activity. Walking in a city or park was equally effective, but the greatest improvement in esteem and mental health was noticed in outdoor areas with water. Gardening is not only a physical workout, but it’s a chance to take a break to get some fresh air and sunshine and now we know gardening it is good for the health inside and out.

# [Spring Lawn Care](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/fresh-air/89/)

[](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/spring-lawn-care.jpg)Spring lawn maintenance is important for a healthy lawn all season. Power raking and aerating are enough to make anyone moan and groan, but neglecting maintenance and seasonal tasks can lead to bigger problems down the road. In most areas spring maintenance chores include fertilizing, applying herbicides, fertilizing, raking, and aerating.

Raking the lawn and removing the thatch is one of the most important spring chores. Thatch is part of a healthy lawn, but too much thatch can be detrimental, increasing diseases and decreasing drought tolerance by preventing roots and rhizomes from reaching the soil. Even if the lawn was raked in the fall, it’s important to remove all the grass that died over the winter. To see how much thatch has built up, spread the blades of grass apart and poke around until you hit soil. More than half an inch of thatch is considered excessive. If the thatch goes beyond the first joint to your index finger it’s time to power rake. Power rakes can be rented for about $50 a day. If you’re not comfortable operating cumbersome powered equipment, a local landscaping crew will be more than happy to do it for you.

Aerating is a yearly lawn maintenance task that increases oxygen and encourages new healthy growth. Aerating is performed by a machine that uses hollow tines to punch holes in the ground and remove plugs of soil and grass. These plugs will be chopped up in the next mowing, filtering back into the grass. The fresh soil brings micronutrients to the surface, which helps the thatch decompose. Aerating is extremely beneficial in heavy clay soils. Aeration alleviates compaction, a problem especially evident in high traffic areas where grass is stressed. Professionals can tell you how deeply to aerate for your lawn based on the type of grass and soil quality.

Get a soil test. Lawns perform best at a pH of 6.5 to 7. Soil can be naturally acidic, so it’s best to check periodically. Adding lime without testing is inefficient. Soil that is too alkaline (numbers higher than seven) is equally detrimental. At the ideal pH more nutrients are available to the growing grass. A local cooperative extension can tell you how much lime is needed per sq foot of lawn to bring the pH up to the correct level. Excessive moss can be a sign of low pH or severe compaction.

Lawn experts generally recommend fertilizing twice a year–once in spring and again in fall. If you are not performing power raking or aeration, a pre-emergent weed and feed may be applied in later winter. These pre-emergent herbicides prevent annuals like crabgrass from sprouting.

For homeowners who prefer an organic lawn maintenance program. One cubic yard of compost can be added to every 1,000 square feet of lawn. Spread evenly with a push broom. Compost will jumpstart the soil microbes for a healthier lawn. Corn gluten meal, also called CGM is an organic alternative to chemical weed and feed products. Don’t use pre-emergent if you are trying to overseed.

Overseeding the lawn is a great way to keep out the weeds. Overseeding is recommended after power raking to cover any bare spots. Depending on your climate you can choose to overseed in spring or fall. Warm season grasses are usually overseeded in spring and cool season grasses are usually planted in the fall.

Some of these tasks, like aerating, don’t need to be done every year, but it’s best to stay ahead of maintenance before things get out of hand and make the job harder to do and consequently less likely to get done. Although power raking and aerating seem very traumatic they are extremely beneficial for a healthy lawn in the long run. Try these tips for a healthier greener lawn all season long.

# [Night Blooming Garden](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/fresh-air/82/)

[](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/nightbloom.jpg)A moon garden transforms an everyday backyard into a magical retreat after sunset. With our busy modern lifestyle, we have little personal time for our hobbies. Nowadays many garden tasks are performed in the cooler hours after work and after dinner when the sun is going down. After dark a landscape full of greenery is overcome by shadows, turning a regular backyard into a creepy jungle. Light and colorful flowers and bright foliage are ideal for moon gardens. White, yellow, lime green, and light purple stand out after dark seemingly floating in the air.

Although moon gardens are perfect for suburban gardeners, they are not a recent invention. It’s doubtful that early Americans would have considered the white roses trailing over the front porch a moon garden, but it is likely that they admired the glowing effect of the white flowers as they sat on the front porch watching the sun set and the moon rise.

Pollination is normally associated with daytime flyers like humming birds, butterflies, and bees, but after the sun sets another group of pollinators takes flight–moths. Almost all moths are nocturnal and carry out their pollination at night. Many very common and valuable plants including, tobacco, bananas, and papayas are pollinated by nocturnal moths.

One of the most common, yet impressive, nighttime moths is the hummingbird moth, also called the sphinx moth. These large moths are very easy to identify by their thick furry bodies as they hover in front of flowers sipping nectar through their long straw-like tongues. Nighttime pollinators prefer light-colored flowers that are the last to fade into the dark. Tubular flowers are well suited to pollination by moths. Here are a few nighttime favorites. Many of these plants are especially fragrant at night.

Angel Trumpets Brugmansia

Cleome

Datura

Evening primrose Oenothera biennis

Four O-Clocks

Flowering Tobacco

Gardenia

Gaura

Honeysuckles

Hostas

Night blooming Jasmine Cestrum Nocturnum

Lilies

Lavenders

Moon Flowers Ipomoea alba

Sweet Potato Vine

Salvias

Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow Brunfelsia

Yucca

A successful moon garden can be achieved easily by adding a few of these attractive plants to the garden. Even in pots, these plants will add nighttime interest to the garden. For full enjoyment, a moon garden must have comfortable seating for the gardener and guests to relax. To take a moon garden to the next level, landscape with lighting, torches, or jar candles, depending on the budget. A small water feature can reflect the plants and wrap the evening in the soothing sound of running water. When you plan ahead with night blooming plants, your garden will be at its most beautiful when you have time to enjoy it.

# [Water Gardens](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/fresh-air/water-gardens/)

[](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/02.07.09_WaterGarden_011.jpg)We work hard to turn our back yards into sanctuaries, retreats where we go to relax and recharge after a hectic day. We strive to create an Eden of our own, a place that conjures up peace and serenity. Nothing does this quite as effectively as a water garden. The benefits are many; not only for you and your children but also your neighbors and the environment.

Most of us have experienced the soothing sound of water splashing over rocks, but it can also provide the added benefit of drowning out other, less desirable noises, such as a busy street or loud neighbors. Moving water has the added benefit of releasing negative ions into the atmosphere, helping to purify the air. This is why air always seems fresher by the ocean or near a river. A body of water also helps cool the area around it.

Water gardens naturally attract existing wildlife already living in the area, giving you and any children in your life the opportunity to commune with nature in a way that is unique to most city dwellers. Sit quietly in your yard and watch birds bath, butterflies drop in for delicate sips of water, and frogs soaking in the shallows. Add koi for a dazzling sparkle below the surface as well. There are countless unique and fanciful plants to adorn your garden with; delicate floating lilies, delightful feathery papyrus and diminutive fairy moss to name a few.

For the water conscious they can be used without worry. Water gardens have a stigma for being water wasteful, but if planned correctly, they need no more than a traditional lawn and sometimes even less. The best way to achieve this is with proper shading of the pool with trees and shrubs or with the plants growing in your garden such as lilies.

With everything a water garden has to offer, your yard will become an enchanting place to entertain and delight guests during summer bbq’s or evening cocktail parties. Your back yard will become the envy of the neighborhood and increase the value of your home.

# [10 Tips for planting a butterfly garden.](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/fresh-air/72/)[http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/butterfly-300x225.jpg](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/butterfly.jpg)

1. Create a wind barrier. Cassia, citrus, birch, sumac, privet, cherries, and plums are among the trees that are nectar and host plants for a wide range of butterflies.
2. Butterflies are nearsighted, plant large groups of flowering plants that butterflies can see from a distance.
3. Daisy-like flowers, including asters, blanket flowers, coreopsis, cosmos, coneflowers, black eyed Susan’s, and zinnias are all butterfly favorites.
4. Butterflies need water for salt and valuable trace nutrients. Add rocks to a birdbath so butterflies can drink without getting wet.
5. Set out a large flat rock in a sunny area where butterflies can warm-up on cooler mornings.
6. Attract humming birds and butterflies with tubular and trumpet-shaped flowers like hibiscus and daylilies, and phlox.
7. Adult monarchs use milkweeds as nectar plants and host plants. There are over 100 types of milkweed that will attract monarchs, from wild milkweed to showier types, with purple, orange, or red flowers. Milkweeds contain a chemical that protects monarch caterpillars by giving them a bad taste.
8. Swallowtail butterflies prefer plants in the umbel family for larval hosts. These include parsley, dill, carrots, and fennel. Swallowtails will also use citrus plants.
9. Herbicides and pesticides can be harmful to butterfly larvae. Avoid using pesticides like Bt that target caterpillars specifically.
10. Bigger caterpillars make bigger butterflies. Caterpillars are voracious eating machines, capable of eating the leaves off of an entire plant.

**Additional Tips for Building an Awesome Butterfly Garden**

Adding flowering nectar plants is a great way to attract beautiful butterflies to your yard. A lot of properties are visited by butterflies that are just passing through. Planting a large mass of colorful nectar plants encourages butterflies to stay longer, instead of quickly passing by looking for a better habitat that provides what butterflies instinctively need. A butterfly’s main mission is to mate and lay eggs on appropriate host plants, while sustaining themselves on flower nectar and water from small puddles. Butterflies generally produce four or five generations of adults a season. These adults generally live between two to six weeks, but the last generation will return to Mexico for the winter. Monarchs are famous for their yearly migration, but almost all butterflies move south to warmer areas. In the last months of summer, as the days get shorter, all the nectar that the butterflies eat is converted into fats that are stored on the butterfly’s body. During the cooler, shorter days of winter the reproductive systems of males and females go dormant, until they are reawakened in the spring. This rest period conserves energy allowing the butterflies to survive for many months longer then they would normally. Early-blooming nectar plants are especially crucial in the spring when butterflies leave their wintering-grounds, racing to mate and lay eggs before they are programmed to die. Butterflies are very picky about which host plants they will lay eggs on. Most butterflies have one preferred group of plants they will use. Under normal circumstances female monarchs will only deposit their eggs on milkweed plants, if milkweed is not found the female will most likely die without laying any eggs. This is why it is so important to provide host and nectar plants that are attractive to butterflies.

# [Eco-Friendly Outdoor Spaces](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/gardening/eco-friendly-outdoor-spaces/)

[](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/eco-friendly.jpg)If you’re looking to go “green” and do your part in saving the environment, outdoor living is a great place to start. Organic living is being utilized across the globe by using reusable and renewable resources. Shop at thrift stores, consignment shops or garage sales for wonderful items. Re-using another man’s junk can be another man’s treasure. Older items hold character from a different time and place.

Instead of installing an electric lighting system that will drive up your energy bills, start by lining the patio and walkways with solar lights. Cast a soft light in flower beds with solar lighting. This will give an ambient glow, perfect for outdoor parties.  Looking to replace old plastic furniture? Instead donate it to the community or recycle. Replace old pieces with gorgeous teak wood furniture as it is a renewable resource which will look beautiful for years to come.

Making your own compost is an easy, budget friendly way to feed plants and enrich soil. Products are available on the market that will actually do all the work. The only thing you’ll need to do is throw waste into it.

Save water resources by capturing water from the gutters when it rains. Use the natural rain water collect on plants and gardens. This is also a great idea in case of a drought and water use is restricted.

Border edging can still look great with green options such as river rocks, wood and recycled plastic. Avoid using products that are not natural from the earth or specify that they are from recycled materials.

# [Tips for Managing Weeds in Turfgrass](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/gardening/tips-for-managing-weeds-in-turfgrass/)

[](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/weeds.jpg)To keep weeds out of the lawn, a good defense is the best offense. To encourage a stronger healthier lawn, let the grass grow until it is four inches tall before mowing with a cutting height of two inches or more. Letting the lawn grow longer makes the roots stronger and decreases the room weeds have to get established. Reseeding bare patches is a good proactive approach to prevent weeds from getting a foothold.

Pre-emergence herbicides, like weed-and-feed, are only effective at preventing crabgrass and annual weeds from germinating if applied precisely before the growing season. These weed-and-feed products do very little to stop perennial weeds that are already established. Apply broad spectrum and selective week killers early in the season. Later, mature weeds require multiple applications of weed killer since they can grow back from their extensive roots. Glyphosate, (RoundUp) is a broad-spectrum herbicide that kills all weeds, including grass. Avoid over-spray on plants and shrubs. Rain and irrigation systems will wash weed killer off the leaves. To make the most of the product, apply weed killer when rain is not in the forecast for at least 24 hours. Depending on the active ingredient, weeds will be dead within hours, or can take up to two weeks to fully absorb the chemicals.

When choosing a weed killer, carefully read the directions, making sure the herbicide is effective on the problem weeds in your yard. Selective herbicides are generally broken down into two categories, broadleaf, or grassy. Broadleaf herbicides have multiple active ingredients and will also kill St. Augustine grass.

Pesky weeds like sedge, also known as nut grass, grow from tubers (“nuts”) embedded over a foot below the surface. Nut grass can easily be identified by its triangular flower stems. When nut grass is pulled from the ground, the fleshy stems separate from the tuber, allowing the tuber to re-grow. These aggressive plants require specialized herbicides like Image, or SedgeHammer, previously called Manage. Follow the package directions, allowing the plant to retain intact for at least two weeks, so the herbicide can be absorbed all the way down to the tuber.

Weeds are some of the most prolific spreaders, releasing billowing seeds to all corners of the yard if given the chance. Mechanical weed removers stab fleshy roots, like dandelion, and pull them from the ground with the aid of a foot pedal. Dandelions are one of the weeds that can back after weed killer applications. For these strong plants the best course of action is to sever the root, or wait until autumn to use weed killer when the plants will have less opportunity to regenerate.

The best cure for weeds is prevention. Fertilize your lawn, deal with any pest problems affecting growing, and remove weeds that are already creeping in, before they prepare to launch a hostile takeover that will be more difficult to manage.

# [http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/curbappeal-300x225.jpg](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/curbappeal.jpg)[Curb Appeal](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/gardening/56/)

If you’re selling your current house or moving into a new one, great landscaping is essential for instant curb appeal, making your house an inviting investment. Before visitors leave their cars they will subconsciously decide what feeling your house and landscaping gives them. Curb appeal is easily achieved with a little thought and planning. Spending money on improving landscaping is more cost-effective, dollar for dollar, than renovating a kitchen or bathroom. Landscaping can have a 100%, or more, return on the initial investment. However, poor quality landscaping can reduce home value by10% and increase the time it takes to sell.

If your home’s landscaping is superior to others in the neighborhood it’s possible to get 7-10% more than similar homes in the area. According to industry professionals, properties with mature trees or shade trees sell for 10%, or more, compared to properties without trees, or trees that don’t shade buildings. When choosing trees for curb appeal consider attributes like seasonal flowers, attractive peeling bark and whether an evergreen or deciduous tree is desired. If you notice a particular plant thriving in your neighborhood, chances are it will work for you.

Keep all landscaping, including the lawn, well maintained. Overgrown landscaping looks neglected. Apply fresh mulch and remove overgrown trees and shrubs, especially if they are crowding the building or could cause structural damage. If necessary, consider replacing patchy lawns with fresh sod. Use native and low-maintenance plants that are drought tolerant. Maintenance and longevity of plants are important considerations for sellers and potential buyers. Plants can add privacy and create a more enjoyable place to spend time. Make the most of your home’s good features by staging outdoor areas with chairs and benches that create inviting spaces where potential buyers can picture themselves spending time or entertaining.

Small changes make a big difference. Whether you choose to hire a professional landscape architect or go DIY, chances are you will make a good return on your investment.

Use tall grasses and larger trees to detract from unbalanced features on your home. Fill blank walls and awkward spaces between windows with climbing plants like roses, clematis, or passionfruit. In narrow spaces try upright plants like Juniper ‘Blue Arrow’ or Italian Cypress. For visual interest use weeping trees in front of smaller plants and shrubs to add more perspective and dimension to the overall planting. Add hanging plants, or window baskets to highlight architectural features. Make the front door as inviting as possible with combinations of colorful potted plants. Define walkways with plants and neat beds. Keep edging tidy and well defined to improve the appearance and structure of the landscape.

With a few well chosen trees, shrubs, and colorful flowers it’s possible to maximize your home’s curb appeal and give it the facelift it needs to sell quickly in any market. Landscaping is even more important in tropical climates. In these areas it’s possible to recoup a 20% return on your investment.

# [http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/container-garden-300x225.jpg](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/container-garden.jpg)[Container Garden](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/fresh-air/51/)

A container garden can be as simple as putting a plant in a pot, but with a little time and attention to detail it can also be a source of beauty and joy. These portable gardens can be enjoyed anywhere, whether you live in an apartment with a tiny deck, or you’re looking to add a splash of color along the walk to your front porch. A well thought out plan can provide years of pleasure; it just takes a little foresight and answering some simple questions.

Start by taking a look at the place you want your garden to call home. Is it exposed to full intense sun, or does it sit in the shade most of the day? This will be a key factor in choosing the type of plants that grace your garden. A sun loving plant such as bougainvillea will not be happy in deep shade, and a pot of violets won’t last long in the hot summer sun. Matching your plants to their proper environment will save you time, money, frustration and unsightly sick plants.

Next, you’ll want to consider the look and feel of your garden. Both the plants and containers will play a role in the design. Do you want to recreate a cottage garden filled with herbs and flowers in earthen pots? Maybe you prefer the idea of two stately well trimmed shrubs on either side of your front door in beautifully ornate planters. Whatever your plan, it’s important to remember the pot not only houses the plants but shows them off as well. A container can be just about anything that will hold soil and has proper drainage. Don’t hold yourself only to the tried and true; with a little imagination you can turn your container garden into living art.

When choosing your plants, keep in mind how much time and energy you want to put into your garden. Of course all plants require some maintenance, but some require more work than others. Faster growing plants will need to be repotted more often. Other plants shed their leaves, or drop flower petals and fruit leaving a mess to cleaned up. Annuals will need to be changed out from season to season and some perennials may need to be protected from the weather at different times of the year. Your container garden should be an enjoyment, not another chore you dread working on.

Once you have settled on your plants and their pots, you will need the proper soil.  Some plants, such as succulents, prefer coarse porous soil that drains quickly. Other, such as tropical plant, prefer soils that retain their moister. When filling your containers with your planting medium, make sure to leave two inches of space between the top of the pot and the soil for easy watering. Top dressing your plants with stones or other decorative material will add a nice finishing touch, deter weeds, and help keep the soil in place when watering.

There is no hard and fast rule when it comes to watering; once again different plants have different needs. However a good rule of thumb is to feel the soil. If the top inch or so is dry it’s time to water. Keep in mind container gardens dry out faster and will need to be watered more frequently then plants in the ground. When you do water, do so until water starts to run out the bottom of the container so you know the soil has been thoroughly moistened.

Lastly you want to make sure your plants are properly fed.  Watering causes the nutrients to be flushed out of the soil over time, so regular fertilizing is a must. Whether you use a slow release granular fertilizer that’s mixed in with the soil or a liquid you add to the water, make sure you follow the instructions on the label. Over fertilizing will burn the roots and can kill the plant.

Most importantly as with all gardening project, have fun and enjoy creating your container garden. The more you enjoy it, the more others will too.

# [Earth Day](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/fresh-air/46/)

[](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/plant_for_the_planet_logo.jpg)Earth Day is one holiday the entire world can celebrate by giving back to our one and only Mother Earth. The first Earth Day was organized by peace activist John McConnell, coinciding with the 1969 UNESCO conference held in San Francisco around the Spring Equinox on March 20th.

John McConnell was a Midwesterner who moved to San Francisco to pursue his interest in activism. He was a prolific activist, organizing campaigns for many causes, including peace, hunger, and environmental issues. McConnell’s activism was inspired by the appalling pollution he saw while working at a plastic factory. McConnell became so disgusted with the pollution resulting from plastic manufacture that he made it his life’s work to promote environmental activism and stewardship.

Earth Day became a recognized holiday in 1970 with the help of Wisconsin-senator Gaylord Nelson, who continued his environmental work after being voted-out of the senate. Since 1970, Earth Days are held on April 22nd of every year. Even Senator Nelson couldn’t predict the success of his ambitious idea, saying of the project, “it was a gamble, but it worked.”

The 1970′s were an important time for environmental legislation. There was momentum built up by the growing awareness of social issues, pollution, and our impact on wildlife and wilderness.

Today many of the same issues exist: threatened and endangered species, pollution from nuclear waste, coal, munitions, boats, pharmaceutical waste, untreated sewage, mining waste, brewing waste, and so on. The Earth is not our garbage can, but we often treat it that way.

Since the new millennium Earth Day has added Global Warming as a key issue. The good news is 2007 was the most successful Earth Day with an estimated one billion people participating in close to two hundred countries all over the world. The most common way to participate is to plant a tree.

Planting a tree on your property can benefit the earth in a number of ways. Trees remain the most economical and effective way of removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. A mature a tree can offset 48 lbs of CO2, and at the same time return enough oxygen for two people. Shade from mature and growing trees can cool buildings significantly, reducing the amount of time the air conditioner needs to run.

**Fast Growing Shade trees include:**

*Paulownia Tomentosa*, also called Princess Tree. This Chinese native is one of the fastest growing landscape trees, growing over 10 feet a year, fragrant wisteria-like blooms in spring.

*Eucalyptus polyanthemos,* Eucalyptus Trees grow over 6 feet per year, maintaining attractive scented foliage year-round.

*Lagerstroemia, Crape Myrtles can vary great in height from cultivar to cultivar, but many are fast growing and they are available in a range of colors, from lavender to bright red. Look for Muskogee, Tuscarora, Arapaho, or Red Rocket, all grow up to five feet per year.*

*Trachycarpus fortunei,* Windmill Palm is one of the most rugged and easy to grow up all the palms. Drought tolerant these Chinese palms grow up to two feet per year with very little care.

# [http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/colorful-water-wise-landscape-300x225.jpg](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/colorful-water-wise-landscape.jpg)[7 Tips for Water Wise Landscaping](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/gardening/32/)

The Southern California Friendly Garden combines the beauty of native and California-friendly plants with efficient water use outdoors. Are you following the basic principles of water wise landscaping in your garden?

1. Use less-than-thirsty plants in your garden. Keep turf grass (the thirstiest plant of all!) to a minimum. Look for plants that are well-suited to regional and local conditions.
2. Group plants thoughtfully. When selecting trees, shrubs, ground covers, perennials and annuals for your garden, look for those that naturally grow together and use about the same amount of water.
3. Use water wisely. Water plants only when needed, not by the clock or calendar. Water at night, when evaporation is much lower and air is calmer. Avoid runoff and overspray.
4. Improve your soil. Routinely cultivate your soil, incorporating organic matter such as compost. Doing so improves the soil’s ability to resist evaporation and retain moisture. Aerate heavy or compacted soil around trees.
5. Mulch. A two- to four-inch layer of mulch also evens out temperature extremes, keep soil cool on hot days and warm on cool days. It also prevents soil from crusting, allowing better water penetration. Take a cue from nature and choose one of many organic mulches that add great visual texture to your landscape, such as shredded bark or chips, wood grindings, compost, aged sawdust or even low-growing ground cover. Inorganic mulches, such as gravel or rock, let the most water in and are frequently used with plants susceptible to crown rot.
6. Plant trees. Trees help to lower air and soil temperatures, reducing plant and soil moisture loss.
7. Group container plants. Arrange containers so they shade one another. During droughts or periods of drying winds, place them in the deepest shade they can tolerate. Wet the entire root ball; double pot by setting small pots inside larger ones with a layer of sand or gravel between. Top-dress pots with a layer of mulch over the soil.

# [http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/balcony_may071-300x225.jpg](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/balcony_may071.jpg)[Balcony Plants](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/gardening/balcony-plants/)

People who live in apartment buildings are limited in their gardening choices. Many units have small balconies, which presents residents with a couple of choices. The standard sized balcony has just enough room for a small table and a couple of chairs, or perhaps an outdoor garden to enhance or conceal the view.

There are a number of considerations when planning a balcony garden. Altitude and direction will determine how much wind and sun your balcony will have. The higher the balcony, the more wind your garden will be subjected to. The closer you are to the ground, the less wind you will see.

In San Diego, the prevailing winds are westerly. As storms come through, the wind will cycle from northerly to south winds. East facing balconies will be subject to the dry Santa Ana winds, which can vary from straight out of the north to east. These winds are high velocity, and east side balconies will need some protection.

Pots  
Choosing pots for your outdoor plants depends upon several factors. Plastic pots are lighter, and hold in moisture. They come in a variety of styles and colors, but care should be taken for plants in sunny locations. Dark colored pots can easily heat up in the sun. Plastic  provides no insulation, and degrades over time with exposure to the elements. They will eventually need to be replaced.

Terra cotta pots are clay. They have thick walls, and are heavier than plastic. While providing insulation to keep roots from overheating, they also will wick moisture away from the potting soil. This can help keep plants from being overwatered, but it also means you must pay closer attention to prevent your soil from drying out. A clay pot is less likely to be blown over, and takes much longer to degrade. These pots can last a long time if you don’t drop them! And if you do break a clay pot, the fragments can be used to place over drainage holes in new pots to reduce moisture loss. Regardless of material, all pots need to have a drainage hole.

Decorative containers can add style and color to a balcony garden. However, these containers do not have drainage holes, and are intended to hold a regular pot. When using these, the plant  
should not be snugly at the bottom, as it will be sitting in drainage water. Use a stone or piece of pottery to keep the plant up off the bottom, so the drainage water can evaporate.

# [Grow Your Own Fresh Air](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/fresh-air/grow-your-own-fresh-air/)

[](http://greenacresvista.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/indoorplants1.jpg)How many of us stop to think about what’s in the air we are breathing? Given the fact that we involuntarily take in as many as 20,000 life sustaining breaths in a typical day, it stands to reason that the quality of each inhale should be a thing of upmost importance.

So what is air? From the outset, it’s simply a mixture of gases we can’t see; oxygen (21%), Nitrogen (78%), with the remaining 1% made up of water vapor, argon, small amounts of carbon dioxide, and traces of other gases. Air is the stuff of life, ingeniously produced naturally by plants as a gift for all living things from our mother Earth. Air on its own accord is a perfect substance, but the air we breathe is anything but that due to the elements that make up our indoor environments.

In today’s world, just about every inside setting has man-made materials that emit harmful substances into the air we end up breathing. The culprits are commonplace starting with the obvious like building materials, the structural components and fabrics included in many typical household furnishing, paint and wall covering, nearly every type of flooring (carpet is a notorious contributor), and not surprisingly, numerous other accessories that make up a home. Because we are so often exposed to a wide range of air borne toxins, most of us don’t even realize it’s among us with no accounting for the silent damage it is causing.

The resulting effects of these impurities are common maladies that can be directly associated with one’s environment, including an assortment of allergies, asthma and other lung related ailments, irritations and of the eyes, nose, and throat, unexplained fatigue, headaches, chronic congestion, among others.

Because many toxins have become so commonplace in our homes, it is easy to think there is nothing much to worry about. In truth, the effects of these indoor emissions are anything but benign. Symptoms brought about by synthetic contaminants may not show immediate acute reactions but extended exposure can lead to, among other things, a health calamity called “multiple chemical sensitivity” (MCS). This is a condition of hypersensitivity that leads to a state of increased allergic reaction to a wider variety of ordinarily common substances like dust, dust mites, mold spores, pollen, and even some types of food. Things that would normally have no effect on someone suddenly become dangerously intrusive.

Although indoor pollution spares no one, the most susceptible are children, and infants. Statistics point out that as many as 90% of asthma cases involving children can be attributed to indoors allergens. There is even indication that sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) may be connected to indoor pollutants as infants are sensitized to synthetic chemicals while in the womb, well before birth. It is the dynamic growth state of fetuses that make them more vulnerable to the effects of the volatile organic chemicals (VOC) released into the air by synthetic materials. The exposure to VOC’s is only enhanced when newborns come home from the hospital, welcomed to a newly decorated nursery complete with fresh paint, a new carpet or reconditioned flooring , a new crib and mattress, new bedding, wall art, and fresh new toys ( more painted wood and plastic). Designed with love and only good intentions, a nursery can might actually be a tightly contained hotbed of contaminants and a health hazard in the making. But, it doesn’t have to be this way.

Given the fact indoor environments can and do have a direct effect on our well being, it is also true that we can take specific actions to literally do away with the impurities we have mindlessly interwoven into our living and working spaces. How? The simple solution can be found in a wide array of household plants and the residual effect is always beautifying.

Numerous scientific studies have proven that plant leaves have a natural ability to absorb and destroy organic chemicals floating in our breathing space through a process known as “metabolic breakdown”. Nature has equipped plants with the ability to miraculously transform pollutants into a source of food for itself and the microbial environment that exists in the soil surrounding its roots. In simple terms, pollutants are absorbed via microscopic openings in leaves called stomata. The toxins are then digested or “translocated” to the roots where they are converted by organic microorganisms into a virtual feast.

A second way plants supply microbes with air pollutants is through “transpiration”, a process brought about when water vapor is emitted into the atmosphere from plant leaves. As water quickly moves up from the root system, resulting convection currents pull the tainted air down into the soil surrounding the roots where microbes begin the process of conversion.

If you could ask plants what organic chemicals they would find most delectable, my guess is the overwhelming favorite would be Formaldehyde because it is so prevalent. This toxic and potentially carcinogenic chemical is found to be emitted throughout the home from draperies, upholstered furniture, numerous fabrics, floor covering, gas stoves, and even from garbage bags and facial tissue.

Using this one example, there are dozens of plants that are extremely effective in removing Formaldehyde from a home’s air supply. By inundating the environment with a selection of leafy plants, it is possible to create a relative Formaldehyde (and other toxins) free environment. The following chart illustrates 50 different plants that are proven to be effective in gobbling up this toxin from the air and delivering it to the insatiable microorganisms living in the soil surrounding its roots:

There are numerous toxic organic chemical influences that affect our breathing space with most deriving from a material source that includes one type of solvent or another in its manufacturing. In addition to Formaldehyde, these are the most common organic chemicals found in many residential and commercial indoor settings: Acetone, Methyl alcohol, Ethyl acetate, Ethyl alcohol, Benzene, Trichloroethylene, Xylene and Toluene, plus Ammonia and Ammonium Hydroxide, the common element used in refrigeration.

Because it is so difficult to identify each and every toxin within your living space, it’s wise to include a variety of plants throughout the home with particular attention paid to rooms where the most time is being spent. Of course, it is of the upmost importance to address the needs of infants and children, to be certain every precaution is taken to produce the freshest and cleanest toxin free air as possible.