

How Beautify Your Yard with Less Work



EASY LIVING
YARDS

Ben Hale

Welcome to this Easy Living Yards guide!

This guide will help you have a more fulfilling lifestyle by liberating you from your yard maintenance routine.

These tips are actionable ways you can change your yard to save time and create beauty. Both ways will help you and your family enjoy your life more fully.

In this guide, I've cut out the fluff and delivered just what you need to know to **take action today**.

I believe we all have the capacity to change the world in our own way if we set our mind to it. **I hope this inspires you in two ways: to get more time back from your yard, and to use that time to improve the world in your own special way.**

When you're ready to take action, share your progress at [this exclusive Q&A page](#).

Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions.

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How to Beautify your Yard with Less Work

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1. Reduce Lawn Work

Why you should reduce your lawn:

- Less mowing area
- More interest
- Less work

What to do:

- Grouped planting beds
- Ground cover plantings
- Hardscape elements



Top: Sedge (Carex spp.) Ground Cover

Middle: 'No Mow' Lawn

Bottom: Xeriscaping

Details:

A **grouped planting** adds a third dimension to a previously two-dimensional area. These grouped plantings can be strategically placed to block a view or focus a view to another desirable area based on the type of planting.

More on this in section 2.

A ground cover planting will still maintain a sense of openness and is generally a species that is more accustomed than grass to growing in a large area by itself or with a few other species, while staying low to the ground. These plantings require minimal maintenance once established.

Some ground cover examples include **various ivies** for shaded areas. I highly recommend non-aggressive species that aren't considered invasive. In sunny places, you can consider a **prairie-type planting**. There are plenty of mixes available for different environmental conditions such as wet soil, clay, sandy, dry, or shade. Take a look at what the **Prairie Nursery in Wisconsin** offers for examples.

If it is desired to maintain a grass-like appearance, there are many varieties of **sedge** (*Carex* spp.) that can be planted in place of the grass. Another option in some areas – generally the northern half of the US or similar climates – could be to plant a **'no-mow' type lawn** that uses sun-tolerant varieties of fine fescue.

Another option for replacing lawn would be to replace some areas with a hardscape element. Such spaces could include a rock garden or patio space.

A **rock or 'xeriscape' garden** can be designed in such a way to be very attractive, require minimal maintenance, and provide a specific microclimate for certain plants.

2. Plant in Groups

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Why you should plant in groups:

- Better plant growth
- Curb appeal
- Less cluttered

What to do:

- Design garden beds with multiple plants
- Include variation: height, texture, color



Above: A well-known grouped planting design, UK

Details:

Planting in groups provides aesthetic value to a landscape. Most yards have plants scattered or isolated across the yard. We are naturally and pleasantly drawn to group plantings. For small groups, odd-numbered plantings are generally considered optimal, especially groups of three.

These groups may be planted in various forms, to provide direction, perspective, or to screen out an undesirable view.

The key to an effective group planting is to first understand its purpose. What are you trying to do? Add perspective? Screen a view? Provide an accent? Whatever the answer is will help determine the shape, organization, density, and species of your planting.

3. Multi-species plantings

Beauty | Work

Why multi-species:

- Better plant health = fewer problems
- More visual interest

What to do:

- Design plant beds with multiple species
- Select species that grow well together
- Use multiple layers (overstory, understory, ground, etc)



Above: Using many species and plant types to work together.

Details:

To support your main plants well, they need to live with plants similar to their natural habitat. This can get very complex very quickly. To keep this simple **look for similar plants that grow well together** in nature or are known to grow together well in designed systems.

Observing plants in an **arboretum** or **local conservatory** or talking to a **garden center** caretaker can be very helpful in understanding what plants can grow well together.

It works like this: Let's say you want an oak tree. We often see oaks standing solitary in a front yard. But an oak grows naturally in a forested or savanna ecosystem. The tree will be much healthier and less susceptible to stress and disease if grown with forest-type plants in a garden beneath it. **Grass actually inhibits growth of most trees**, and vice-versa.

Plants with specific functions will help all species in the garden. A few examples of such functions are **nitrogen fixation, shade, pollinator attracting, predatory insect attracting** (this is a good thing because they eat pest insects), **nutrient accumulating, and ground cover**. There are many more functions that plants provide. And the combination of possibilities is endless. It all depends on the functions needed, what is your main planting element, and what function does the overall planting provide for you.

4. Preserve Views Beauty

Why to preserve views:

- Brings outside beauty into your landscape
- Adds dimension to your landscape

What to do:

- Find the best views outside your property
- Use plantings to 'frame' and enhance the view



Above: A preserved view

Details:

Most landscape settings allow for at least one desirable view that can be preserved or enhanced through design. This helps create a sense of openness and continuation of a design beyond the confines of the actual design.

Preserving a view can be done simply by not planting in the primary sight line toward that direction. However, this view can also be enhanced with a few simple tactics.

By placing grouped border plantings to each side of the intended view helps to frame the view and lead the eye. These grouped border plantings also help shield undesirable views.

An additional enhancement is to add shorter plantings along the bottom edge of the preserved view to serve as an additional frame element or to provide an accent. An accent is appropriate if the view is better as a backdrop to the accent planting. However, if the view is the primary focus, the additional planting should add to the view, rather than take focus away from it.

5. Catch and Hold Water

Work

Why you should capture water:

- Reduce manual irrigation
- Improve plant health
- Better water availability

What to do:

- Design water catching gardens
- Catch water in rain containers



Top: Attractive options for large rainwater catchment

Bottom: An attractive rock-filled rain garden

Details:

Water and soil are the most necessary resources of any given design. Soil can be created with good design but water cannot.

Water can only be slowed in its departure or added manually. There are many strategies that hold water on a landscape – some intensive, some less intensive – some attractive, some less so.

The most common way to capture rain is with rain containers. The bigger the container, the better. **Rain containers are helpful** for storing healthy water for your plants without chlorine or hard ground water, but it is still a system that **requires maintenance and work.** There are not yet many low-pressure irrigation systems that work well with rain containers.

The best way to help your plants without work is to catch water in the soil. How is this done? Any way the water can be slowed will allow it to better soak into the soil.

A popular option is with rain gardens. You can also design any garden to capture water better during rain. Instead of commonly shaped mound gardens, create bowl-shaped or indented gardens. If you prefer the raised shape, consider creating an elongated garden, perpendicular to slope so the uphill side of the garden captures water.

Once installed, these gardens require no work to store water.

6. Cohesive Site Design

Beauty | Work

Why you should think about your whole yard:

- Prevents **costly errors**
- Curb appeal
- Work more decisively

What to do:

- Plan big, then act small
- Consider whole property and ideal use
- Take time to understand what you want
- Write plans and vision before work and purchase



Top: Classic cohesive design, UK

Bottom: Cohesive backyard garden

Details:

This section is the most valuable info in this whole guide.
Reference often!

Volumes have been written on this. But steps toward a *more* cohesive design can be taken rather quickly and easily. If you want to ensure a full implementation is done properly, that is probably the work of a professional landscape designer or architect. But if you are intent on making a go of it, here's the soundbite version.

Step 1. Assess all existing features on site.

- What looks good. What doesn't?
- **Where's the area that needs the most help?**

Step 2. Determine what you want.

- What do you want from your landscape?
- **What would make life easier?**

Step 3. Determine how to get what you want.

- Does it just need to be more attractive?
- What's the most sensible way to get what you want?

Step 4. Get a simple, comprehensive design together.

- Use similar plant patterns, colors, or shapes.
- **Put these ideas quickly on paper.**

Step 5. Get the details

- Focus first on the area that needed the most help. What makes it better?
- **Put these ideas quickly on paper.**

Step 6. Get to work

- **Stick to the overall plan.** It's okay if the plan changes, but make sure to get that on paper too.
- Start first with the area that needs the most work.
- **Tackle one thing at a time.** It may take years, but you have direction and a vision.
- A cohesive design doesn't need to break the budget. Simple things can be done to greatly enhance the site.

7. Enhance Existing Spaces

Beauty | Work

Why to enhance existing space:

- Less work than complete redesign
- Update for curb appeal
- May be enough to enjoy

What to do:

- Consider existing 'messy' areas
- Determine simple ways to enhance
- Implement changes



Above: Can you do something to spruce up an existing space?

Details:

The existing natural features of your yard may have a lot of potential for beauty or enjoyment. Sometimes these areas simply need a little work up front.

Let's take an example of an overgrown side lot, full of grasses, thistles, and weeds. Can this area be better utilized? How about as a sort of natural retreat? A simple addition of a small winding rock pathway, coupled with bunched plantings along its edges, provide an established route through this mini wilderness. Perhaps the addition of a few eye-catching wildflowers interspersed through the remaining area will bring a seemingly drab area into a fuller potential. You now have a low maintenance escape for the next time you're avoiding the dishes.

This thought process can be applied to many areas. Remember that landscape design is a creative process. Think expansively, then bring your ideas back to the reality of your budget and capabilities. In addition, consider that nature may be teaching you something with what it is presenting to you. For example, a bunch of weeds are telling you two things – you need to **fill that space with something**, and you probably are low in soil fertility.

8. Plant for the Region

Work

Why you should plant for your region:

- Less maintenance
- Less disease
- Easy establishment

What to do:

- Select plants adapted to your climate
- Consider all local conditions – soil, water, etc
- Consult local experts



Above: A beautiful garden consisting of California native plants

Details:

Consider the extremes of your landscape. Do you get drought, flooding, erosion, extreme sun, high wind, etc? Do you have low nutrient soil? Sand, clay?

There are generally two types of plants that are considered regionally adapted plants – well established ‘natives’ to the area, and foreign plants that have integrated into the region.

Regardless of the type of regionally adapted plant, these are **plants that can thrive in your region**. These plants that have been in an area for several hundred years have weathered the regional extremes in temperature and moisture. They are also most likely fairly **disease resistant** or tolerant due to their survivability.

A good resource for finding these plants and their native or introduced status, as well as their ability to grow in each region can be found at www.plants.usda.gov.

Also talk to **local nurseries** and **arboreta** about locally adapted plants that are hardy, and disease resistant.

9. Reduce Bare Areas

Beauty | Work

Why you should reduce bare areas:

- Prevents weed problems
- Fills space with something attractive/useful
- Done properly, reduces maintenance

What to do:

- Consider a useful purpose for the space
- Fill non-purposed space with plantings
- Use previous tips for low-maintenance design



Above: A prairie style wildflower planting to reduce bare space

Details:

It is fairly common to have open, unplanted space in your yard. This can become a maintenance task or even nightmare. Turn it into something useful or fill it with something attractive.

Colored mulch, rock, or lawns are the most commonly used elements in these areas. These spaces remain relatively 'sterile.' They also require maintenance to keep tidy and free from weeds.

If the intent is to have an open view of the space with a relatively two-dimensional design, a ground cover or 'living mulch' may be established. This ground cover will help shade the soil and regulate temperature, build organic matter, and suppress the growth of other plants.

If the intent is just to fill empty space, this may be an ideal place for a wildflower or grassy planting to resemble a meadow. There are plenty of mixes available for different environmental conditions such as wet soil, clay, sandy, dry, or shade. Take a look at what the **Prairie Nursery in Wisconsin** offers for examples.

10. Think Before Planting

Beauty | Work

Why you should think before planting:

- It is easy to plant, difficult to move plants
- Careful thought is helpful in preventing errors
- Mistakes lead to ugly landscapes or more work

What to do:

- Plan out your work before shopping
- Consider long term maintenance
- Think about how something looks in 5, 10+ years



Above: Careful planning can prevent costly or unsightly mistakes

Details:

All too often, plants are established without careful thought toward the right plant or right location. Planning is your friend! A simple schematic of planting group locations, preserved views, and environmental conditions can immensely improve the quality of a design space.

Go back to [Cohesive Site Design](#) for more.

By carefully selecting plant type and location, many errors can be avoided that may be unpleasant or costly. Some tips to think about to avoid common errors include:

- Plan with the mature size of the plant in mind
- Look up – do you have power lines?
- Look down – are there underground utilities or septic?
- Determine the soil type in your yard and what plants thrive in that soil
- Take sun patterns, wind, water, and temperature into account
- In most cases, avoid isolated plantings. You'll have to mow around it. And it will probably look better in a group planting.
- Ensure a planting will not obstruct a desirable view
- Plan for root expansion to mature size – when planting near structure, do not plant closer than the radius of the mature root system to avoid foundation problems

BONUS TIPS

These additional tips are also very important for more beauty and less work.

Enjoy!

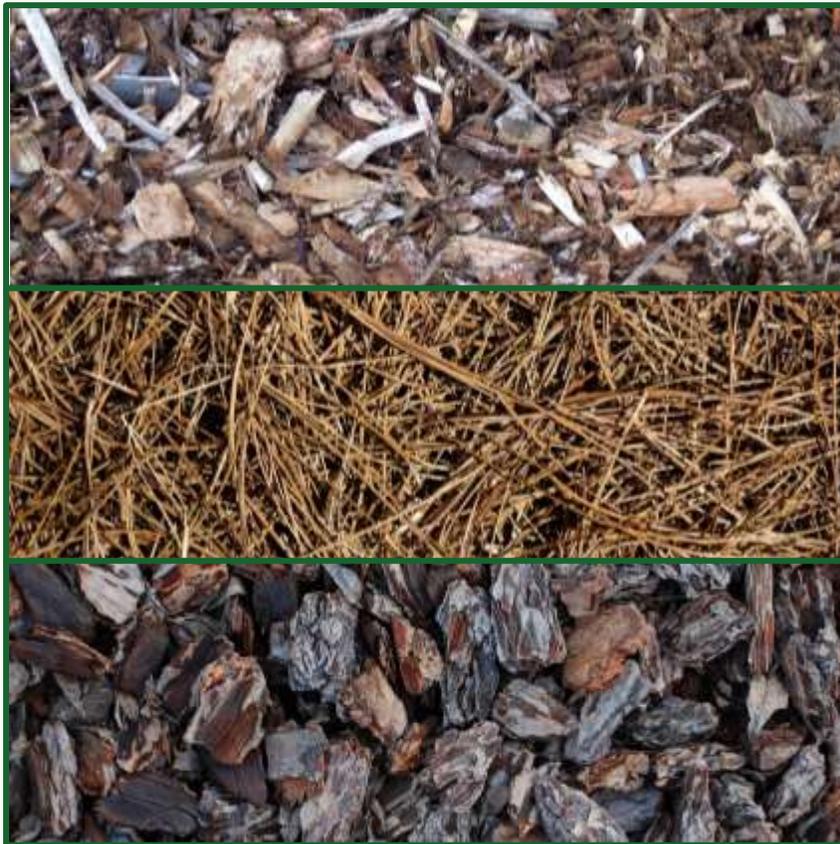
Bonus Tip 1. Mulching/Organic Matter Work

Why you should mulch:

- Prevents weeds
- Builds healthy soil
- Compost fertilizes soil and plants
- Mulch can be attractive

What to do:

- Enhance new beds with compost. Repeat as needed
- Add thick mulch in spring. In fall if necessary
- Keep away from very base of trees to prevent disease



Top: Mulch chips
Middle: Pine needles
Bottom: Pine bark

Details:

Addition of mulch beneath and around plants builds soil health by adding carbon material and enhancing microbial life. Healthy plants need healthy soil. Healthy soil is a massive web of interconnected plants, fungi, and microorganisms. The living soil provides many functions including fixing nitrogen, retaining nutrients, extending the feeding surface area of roots, and preventing disease.

Mulch is usually thought of as wood chips. But it can be any organic material to cover a space, really. Some other examples that are very attractive include pine bark, pine needles, and even shredded leaves.

Mulch used in the proper manner can build your soil health while suppressing weeds. This is especially useful while establishing a new garden bed.

But **don't buy the colored mulch** at the store. Many store bought mulches – especially the colored ones – are infused with dyes or toxins. Sometimes they are sourced from pallets or other treated woods that prevent proper breakdown and can leach chemicals into your soil where it can harm or kill your soil life. If you want wood chip mulch, it is usually best to get it directly from a tree trimming facility, where you can ensure it is from untreated wood.

Other great additions to your gardens include chopped leaves grass clippings, trimmings, and any other plant material really. It is best to avoid anything that may contain weed seeds.

Bonus Tip 2. Utilize Perspective Beauty

Why you should utilize perspective:

- Adds dimension
- Can create welcoming ambience

What to do:

- Focus on spaces that feel too small or too large
- Add elements to reduce feeling
- Enclose large spaces and add focal accents
- Create dimension to small spaces, borrow scenery



Above: Using perspective can add dimension, depth, or ambience through various forms

Details:

This is getting super-hardcore with your yard.

Any landscape design can utilize perspective. A design can be made to look deeper, narrower, wider, or shallower depending on how perspective is applied. The easiest ways to apply perspective is with border plantings.

For a large space, consider enclosing specific areas you want to use. Fill the remaining area with plantings or prairie space that needs less maintenance. Consider adding a path for mystery and enjoyment.

To make a shallow, wide space appear deeper, you can plant a design with open space that narrows the further you are from the main viewpoint.

Another way to help open up a space would be to find at least one **external viewpoint to preserve** by ensuring that view is integrated into the design with proper framing.

To make a long, narrow space appear wider, you do the opposite, where you design your open space to widen as you are further from the main viewpoint.

There are many other ways to apply perspective and adapt your space, but these few examples can help immensely.

Bonus Tip 3. Add Focal Points and Accents Beauty

Why you should have focal points:

- Adds interest to space
- Creative fun

What to do:

- Consider spaces you enjoys/relax/entertain
- If it seems lacking in direction, focal points help
- Add interesting plantings or architecture in a space you often look



Above: A classical design focal point

Details:

A few select focal points or accents in your yard add direction and value. Done properly, this can really set your yard apart. The addition of accents or focal points can easily be overdone. Think of the yard you've seen with all the concrete kissing angel baby gnomes everywhere. ...That's too much.

How it works is to find an area that the eye is drawn to within the landscape. Where do you naturally want to look? Is it kind of boring or plain? You can add an accent piece or planting in that area, to further enhance that focal point. An accent can be a unique or attractive planting, or an interesting physical piece such as a piece of driftwood or a sculpture.

The accent can help define the mood of the space. For example, a bust or urn would usually be found in a classical design as an accent. A piece of driftwood might be used as an accent in a more naturalistic design.

Afterword

Thank you for reading!

I hope you are as excited as I am!

I now want you to choose one thing to do and take action!

I have created an **exclusive Q&A page** for this guide, and I want you to take advantage of it!

Head on over and leave a comment now!

Let me know the **one thing** you're going to do **right now** to create a more attractive yard for less work!

As a parting thought, this is all about **helping you** design your yard to give you **more time in your life to do what you are meant to do**. So go take action, make a positive change in your yard, then **make a positive change in your life!**

If you ever have any questions or suggestions, let me know at

Facebook: [Easy Living Yards](#)

Twitter: [@BenTheSprout](#)

Cheers,
Ben Hale

About the Author

Ben Hale lives with his family in southwest Ohio. He is blessed with an awesome wife, three crazy sons, and amazing family and friends. When not focused on Easy Living Yards and raising healthy happy kids, he enjoys the rugged outdoors, appreciates the tug of a trout on fly, and loves to create. In reality, most of his time is spent trying to make a habitable home, learning how to play again with his sons, doing the dishes, making dinner, and working at a full-time day job.

Ben knows what it's like to struggle with a tough landscape. Moving into a project house required significant work inside and out. It's hard to find the time to work on yard beautification while fixing up the house, working full time, and raising a young family.

- He's gotten notice of **property maintenance violation**.
- He has angry neighbors who think mowing your yard is **more important than family**.
- Other neighbors spite him for not **spraying the yard with chemicals**.

Through extensive research and training, Ben has developed a specific design mindset for landscapes that can be not only attractive and healthy, but also low maintenance.

Come visit [Easy Living Yards](https://www.EasyLivingYards.com) to learn more about improving your life through your landscape!



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