

# ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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## Home Water Efficiency: Planting Low Maintenance Lawns and Landscapes

Enjoy the beauty of lawns and gardens with less work and lower water bills. Having a beautiful landscape brings us much joy, but the financial and environmental costs of watering landscapes can be hefty and maintenance can be tedious. By planting native plants and grasses adapted to our environment and sticking to a few simple guidelines, you can achieve a beautiful landscape that requires less work and less water, leaving more time for swinging in the hammock and listening to the birds.



Source: Stacey Herbold

### Time it right.

- ✓ To prevent weed infestation and to promote a strong root system, the best time to plant grass seed in New Hampshire is August through September. Use a drought tolerant mix with at least 50 percent fine leaved fescues. Once established, a lawn of fine leaved fescues requires no watering. For more information, visit the UNH Cooperative Extension's website at [extension.unh.edu](http://extension.unh.edu).
- ✓ Balled-and-burlapped trees and shrubs should be planted in the early spring, prior to buds popping.
- ✓ Container grown trees and shrubs should be planted in the summer and fall, while soils are still warm. From central New Hampshire and south, planting should occur no later than October 1.

### The secret to success lies in the soil.

- ✓ Give your lawns and plants the best start possible. Underlay areas with at least six inches of loam. Without adequate topsoil for grass or plants, it doesn't really matter what you plant—the vegetation will require excessive watering and fertilization.
- ✓ Send a soil sample to the UNH Cooperative Extension to determine whether any soil nutrient amendments are needed. Fertilization is often not necessary, but if it is determined to be required, look for a natural organic or slow-release fertilizer.
- ✓ Amend soils with compost to improve aeration and water retention and to promote fertility. Prepare new vegetable and flower gardens or new areas to be seeded for a lawn by tilling one to three inches of compost into six to 12 inches of top soil. Existing lawns can be top dressed with one-quarter to one-half inch of compost each spring or fall.
- ✓ Compost may be purchased locally or created in your own backyard. To learn the basics about composting at home, see DES's flier on composting at [www.des.nh.gov](http://www.des.nh.gov); search for "composting."

To learn a more comprehensive approach to backyard composting, go to Los Angeles County's Smart Gardening webpage at <http://ladpw.org/epd/sg/>.

### **Love your natives.**

- ✓ Plant natives. Native vegetation is adapted to the northeast climate and requires little or no watering once established. The UNH Cooperative Extension Home and Garden webpage, located at [http://extension.unh.edu/resources/category/Home\\_and\\_Garden](http://extension.unh.edu/resources/category/Home_and_Garden), provides extensive guidance related to native landscape design and maintenance.
- ✓ Purchase native tree and shrub saplings grown right in New Hampshire from the N.H. State Forest Nursery ([www.nhnursery.com](http://www.nhnursery.com)). Also, check with your local county conservation district ([www.nhacd.org](http://www.nhacd.org)) to find out when your county holds its annual tree, shrub, and bulb sales.
- ✓ Minimize lawn areas to only those areas you actually use for play or sitting and replace with native vegetation, wildflower meadows, or some type of groundcover. If you still would like to be able to walk through these areas, think about planting a ground cover that can withstand some foot traffic. See "These Plants are Made for Walkin' (on)" at [www.extension.unh.edu/FHGEC/docs/Stepston.htm](http://www.extension.unh.edu/FHGEC/docs/Stepston.htm).

### **Mulch**

Mulch eradicates weeds eliminating competition for available water and nutrients, minimizes evaporation, and adds nutrients to the soil during decomposition. For more tips on mulching, go to USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's Backyard Conservation webpage at [http://www.nh.nrcs.usda.gov/features/Backyard\\_Conservation/backyard.html](http://www.nh.nrcs.usda.gov/features/Backyard_Conservation/backyard.html).

- ✓ Mulch tree and shrub beds once per year with three inches to four inches of shredded wood, leaves, bark, or compost. Avoid using peat moss as a mulch. Though an excellent moisture-retentive soil amendment, its very high water-holding qualities result in pulling water from the soil beneath it.
- ✓ Avoid using non-porous plastic, gravel, marble chips and stones as mulch. In sunny locations these materials act as heat sinks, drying the soil beneath. Restrict these items to walkways.
- ✓ Mulch vegetable gardens and flowers with compost or grass clippings.
- ✓ Leave clippings on the lawn after mowing.

### **For Additional Information**

Please contact the Drinking Water and Groundwater Bureau at (603) 271-2513 or [dwgbinfo@des.nh.gov](mailto:dwgbinfo@des.nh.gov) or visit the DES Water Conservation Program webpage by going to [www.des.nh.gov](http://www.des.nh.gov), clicking on the "A to Z" list and scrolling down to "Water Conservation."

### **References and Resources:**

EPA GreenScapes Program [www.epa.gov/epawaste/conserves/tools/greenscapes/index.htm](http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/conserves/tools/greenscapes/index.htm)

NHDES, "Native Shoreland/Riparian Buffer Plantings in New Hampshire"

<http://des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/wetlands/cspa/categories/publications.htm>

Note: This fact sheet is accurate as of March 2013. Statutory or regulatory changes or the availability of additional information after this date may render this information inaccurate or incomplete.