

Conventional vs GREEN Landscaping

From: Wild Bloom <https://wildbloomlandscapes.com/conventional-vs-green-landscaping/>

The GREEN Landscapes Initiative was introduced by Wild Bloom in order to provide education, implement, and certify landscaping that is environmentally beneficial. The initiative lays out criteria for sustainable landscaping that can be easily followed, empowering people to make positive choices about their outdoor spaces. By promoting this type of environmental stewardship, our communities become more sustainable and our ecological impact is reduced.

This type of landscaping is in contrast to what we call “Conventional Landscaping”, which utilizes different methods and has a separate (or maybe even a lack of) philosophy associated with it.

A long-held idea about landscaping has been that it’s defining purpose is to be aesthetically pleasing. Certainly a worthy goal, but having that as the defining purpose, as the most desired outcome, can be self-defeating. **While one should of course strive to make the landscape visually pleasing, this “looks first” mindset sets up the landscaper to miss out on a myriad of opportunities to help the environment.**

WHAT IS CONVENTIONAL LANDSCAPING?

Before going any further, it would be beneficial to discuss what conventional landscaping is.

As I mentioned above, it's primary goals are centered around aesthetics. Conventional landscaping, just like the environmentally minded landscaping we are proponents of, can come in many different styles and themes. Cottage garden, formal, tropical, natural, or any other style can be used to generate a particular look and feel for the space. The possibilities are endless and just like any type of designed space, the results are typically heavily dependent on the designer's skillfulness and the builder's craftsmanship.

Conventional landscaping can also include functional elements. Maybe it's a retaining wall holding back soil, a tree for shade, or a drainage system to rid the landscape of excess rainwater. These functional elements are most often thought of and implemented to serve that one function without consideration of multiple functions or more sustainable methods and materials.

For example, in a conventional landscape, the drainage system mentioned above would typically be some type of underground drainage pipe that deposits the rainwater out into the street where it can flow into the storm drain. This serves the function of minimizing pooling or water damage on the property.

On the contrary, in a landscape focused on sustainability, the drainage system would have an entirely different design and serve multiple purposes, the result of which would provide a positive environmental impact. Instead of directing the water out to the street, one could build a swale and direct the water into that. The swale could be designed to allow the rainwater to be spread throughout the landscape and permeate into the soil.

This would serve multiple functions:

1. Solve the drainage problem.
2. Provide extra water to plants, reducing irrigation needs.

3. Reduce stormwater runoff, which contains pollutants, thereby keeping aquatic ecosystems healthier.
4. The swale could be shaped to add contour and dimension to the landscape, making for a more dynamic and eye-catching look.
5. Help recharge groundwater basins by allowing rainwater to sink into the ground.
6. Reduce maintenance due to healthier plants.

That's six functions instead of one. When the objective of the landscape flips to environmental stewardship, it forces one to think outside the box and opens up new possibilities and opportunities for the landscape that would have been overlooked.

Other hallmarks of conventional landscaping include weed mat, fertilizer use, disregard for soil health, high maintenance needs, high water usage, minimal habitat, impervious surfaces, and low biodiversity.

While conventional landscaping can certainly look great if it's well designed and well built, it's lifespan is typically limited and in most instances, it will have a negative environmental impact.

THE SOLUTION IS GREEN

During my tenure in the landscaping industry, I've observed countless landscapes being built. The methods, materials, and ideas that are used run the gamut from eco-conscious to eco-destructive.

Of the eco-friendly bunch, I've noticed a lot of misinformation and confusion – “What type of mulch is best? Is weed mat good? What about organic fertilizers? Isn't rainwater catchment illegal?”

These questions and more have come up more than a few times and there has never seemed to be any easy to follow recipe for what makes an environmentally friendly landscape.

To solve this problem, we came up with [GREEN Landscapes](#). GREEN is an acronym that means Good soil, Rainwater catchment, Environmentally Efficient, and Native plants.

Now, if someone is unsure how to turn their outdoor space into an environmental asset, they can simply follow the GREEN principles – take care of the soil, use rainwater catchment, use environmentally efficient techniques, and plant mostly natives.

Of course, a little more explanation is needed to be able to implement a landscape based off these principles. To get good results, one needs to learn the techniques and best-practices necessary to build a GREEN Landscape.

Recognizing this fact, we made it part of the GREEN Landscapes Initiative’s mission to provide education on this type of landscaping so that people can have the skills needed to install their own GREEN Landscape or build one for someone else.

Luckily these skills are easily learned and can be acquired through our writings or at our free workshops.

For a more detailed explanation of the principles of a GREEN Landscape, see [“What is a GREEN Landscape?”](#).

HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM CONVENTIONAL LANDSCAPING?

Here’s the difference in a nutshell – A GREEN Landscape’s focus is on environmental stewardship.

Both of these types of landscapes can look good or bad, be built in any style imaginable, can be functional, and can provide enjoyment for whoever is using the landscape.

In fact, on the outside both types of landscaping could even look identical from one another.

What you might not see, however, is the GREEN Landscape has soil that is healthy and teeming with microbial life. Generous amounts of compost have been used, mulch is thickly applied, no fertilizers or herbicides have been used, and care has been taken to avoid compaction.

This healthy soil feeds the plants, reduces maintenance needs, and stores carbon from the atmosphere. The soil soaks up rainwater quickly and holds it there for long periods of time, reducing artificial irrigation requirements for the plants.

The GREEN Landscape has rainwater catchment integrated into its design. This can be made to be visible or hidden from the eye. The plants drink up the extra rainwater to get them through the dry summers. The rainwater is naturally filtered by the soil, reducing watershed pollution. The GREEN Landscape gets many times the amount of rainfall each year than does its conventional counterpart due to its passive rain harvesting design.

The GREEN Landscape is environmentally efficient. It was made to require less maintenance. This reduces fossil fuels, fertilizers, herbicides, and energy use. It was designed to be a carbon sequestration zone. Habitat for birds, bees, butterflies, and other beneficial wildlife is provided by the GREEN Landscape.

Due to the GREEN Landscapes use of native plants, it is resilient to drought, disease, and local weather shifts. It is perfectly adapted to the local climate, soils, and fauna.

Although the Conventional and GREEN Landscape may look alike, there is a lot more going on than meets the eye.

On the other hand, these two types of landscaping often do look very different. You won't find a high water use lawn in a GREEN Landscape. You won't see any weed mat peeking through the mulch, and the patios and walkways will be built to be permeable to water.

Because more thought goes into a GREEN Landscape, they are often built with more care and quality, they are often designed more artfully, and they are often enjoyed more by those who have them.

AND WHAT A DIFFERENCE IT MAKES!

Changing your landscaping to be beneficial to the health our ecosystems is a fantastic way to make a difference for the environment. Although it may seem like a drop in the bucket, the fact is that the best place to start healing the earth is right at home. By focusing on the actions you can take in your day to day life and in your immediate surroundings, you are taking a stance for the environment. You are making a positive difference in the world.

Your drop in the bucket combines with your neighbor's drop, and your friend's drop, and their friend's drop, and that's how change happens. Small actions coalesce to create big change.

Moving forward into an era of environmental precariousness, these seemingly small actions will dictate our future.

– Luke Huskey, Wild Bloom