

## Lawn, garden options needn't bust a budget

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**SUMMARY:** Stretching landscaping dollars will let the frugal get the most out of their yards

Lawn, garden options needn't bust a budget for Oregonians Stretching landscaping dollars will let the frugal get the most out of their yard Lawn, garden options

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JUDY BERCK

Perhaps you are among those with less money to spend this season on your yard but haven't figured out what to spend it on?

Here's advice from experts and garden-variety gardeners on ways to stretch your landscape dollars, so you can enjoy your yard this year without breaking your budget.

Plant an edible landscape. Mark Bigej, owner of Al's Garden Center, offers this as his top tip: "Use attractive edibles like blueberries right in your landscaping, with other ornamental shrubs, so they do double duty. Your fruiting plum trees and cherries can be absolutely gorgeous --you get great spring bloom, you can prune them into interesting shapes, you have nice fall color on them."

Buy or build your own trellis, and put a grape or kiwi vine on it. "Grapes are beautiful over arbors or trellises," Bigej says. "The kiwi is another great vine that has really neat large leaves with red petals and is beautiful in the summer."

If you'd like to invest in edibles, seeds and starts are cheap and can prove cost-effective. For example, the average tomato plant start costing less than \$2 can produce more than 20 pounds of tomatoes in a season.

Raise beds, grow veggies. But where to plant those tomatoes and other vegetables?

If you have a little space in the sun, consider installing raised beds. Vegetables like them because they provide good drainage, and if you plant them with good soil, the result can be healthier, more productive plants.

Many retail and online stores sell raised bed kits that are easy to assemble. For instance, Home Depot sells all kinds of star-shaped, circular and rectangular raised bed kits, starting at \$169.

Or, if you're handy, you can buy the raw materials and build your own for less. (If you live in some parts of Portland, you can even borrow your tools for free from a tool library.)

"You walk the neighborhoods here and see everyone's doing it," says Jonathan Scott of Northeast Portland, who built his own 4-by-6 raised bed last summer and is building a second one.

Scott started his research by browsing the Internet, then headed to Home Depot for his lumber. He ended up buying treated two-by-fours, which he banged together in about an hour. The whole project took less than a day, including two hours to dig out the grass. It cost him less than \$100, including \$35 worth of organic plant starts.

The most expensive items were the top soil and compost, which he bought by the bag. Next time, Scott says, he will try to round up neighbors to buy soil more cheaply from a bulk supplier.

The project was worth it. "The runner beans grew like weeds and gave us oodles --enough for several side dishes a week for months," says Scott, who also grew leeks, peppers, eggplant and tomatoes.

With a little more money and sweat, you could build a raised bed out of decorative rock. For about \$300 including delivery, you could create an attractive 4-by-8 bed using stone such as basalt, quartzite or river rock.

But if you're seeking a cheaper and less labor intensive route, consider sheet mulching. Also known as "composting in place" or "no-dig gardening," sheet mulching is a bed-building technique that suppresses weeds and improves soil and plant health.

"It's the most cost-effective way to make new beds," says Annie Bamberger, a landscape designer with Dennis' Seven Dees in Portland. "You lay out newspapers and cardboard, lay on grass, pile on high-quality soil, and let it sit for three, four months, and then plant right into it.

"Then you don't have the cost of cutting out grass, hauling it away, paying for debris removal or renting a tiller to till in amendments," Bamberger says.

She cautions not to use cheap compost, because it's often infested with weed seeds. "It's better to pay the money and get higher quality," Bamberger says.

(Or you could make your own high-quality compost by throwing your kitchen scraps and leaves into a compost bin purchased from Metro for \$39. You know you should.)

Design your landscape for less. What if your conundrum is that you'd like to improve your landscape design but don't want to spend buckets of money doing it? There are less costly alternatives to full landscape design services, especially if you're willing to do your own legwork.

For instance, Dennis' Seven Dees offers a design program for do-it-yourselfers at its garden centers. You fill out a

site-analysis questionnaire, plot out the area on graph paper and take pictures of the garden site before meeting with a professional landscape designer. In an hourlong consultation, the designer works with you on a design, and gives you a sketch and a suggested plant list.

The cost is a gift certificate for a minimum of \$500, which can be applied toward plants, delivery or anything else the store sells. You also get a 10 percent discount on purchases for a year.

A similar sweat-equity service is offered by a Design in a Day, a firm owned by Carol Lindsay, a past president of the Association of Northwest Landscape Designers who has a special interest in using native plantings and those that require little water. At the Home and Garden show in February, people packed Lindsay's booth to request information about her scaled-down four-hour landscape design service.

Harvest your rainwater. No matter what your budget, you'll have to water whatever you plant. You might consider harvesting some of the bountiful free rainwater that deluges us most of the year in Oregon. You could buy the materials yourself and make a picturesque rain barrel, using free instructions from the Internet.

There are even YouTube videos to guide you. Or you could buy one from a local store, including Rain Barrel Man in Northeast Portland, Division Hardware in Southeast or Home Depot (plastic ones start at \$89.99).

If you live in Portland and are willing to disconnect your downspouts, you can sign up for the Bureau of Environmental Services Clean River Rewards Program. Ratepayers can receive up to 100 percent discount on their storm-water management charges by managing storm-water runoff on their property, as well as free technical assistance.

If you live in the Tualatin River watershed, which includes most of Washington County and parts of Clackamas and Multnomah counties, you can sign up for the Clean Water Hero Program, run by the Clean Water Services. This program provides up to three hours of on-site technical assistance to help you create a sustainable storm-water landscape.

Or combine landscape design with storm-water management and create a rain garden. Rain gardens hold storm-water runoff, allowing it to soak into the ground naturally, helping reduce stream pollution. Typically planted with hardy, low-maintenance perennial plants, they provide food and shelter for birds, butterflies and beneficial insects.

The East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District ([emswcd.org](http://emswcd.org)) offers free workshops on creating a rain garden; the Clean Water Services Web site [cleanwaterservices.org](http://cleanwaterservices.org) also has a great deal of information.

Get help with the job. Sounds like too much work? Take advantage of free good will from your friends and acquaintances and start a garden club. Jessica Holliday of Northeast Portland belonged to one for several years where, once a month, members from six households would work on one family's yard projects for six hours on a Saturday.

"They were mostly the really big projects that you dread doing, but you get five other people and you'd be amazed what you can do in a day," Holliday says.

"We dug a trench for bamboo, we moved some big shrubs, we pulled ivy and blackberry, and put in irrigation. We built six raised beds and moved all the dirt for a couple of vegetable gardens. Stuff got done."

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