

10 things you should know about cultivating an eco-friendly yard



DESIGNS BY SUNDOWN

- 1 Keep it natural.** Michelle Johnson, co-owner of the Fort Collins-based landscaping firm Hydrate Colorado, offers an easy recipe for a natural weed killer: just fill a spray bottle with three parts undiluted vinegar to one part dishwashing soap, and use it to douse the weeds' foliage. "Rinse out a metal sprayer after use," notes Johnson, "since vinegar is corrosive to metal."
- 2 Wait for the ladies.** It's tempting to reach for the insecticide when aphids are devouring your garden, but Alison Peck, owner of Matrix Gardens in Boulder, says to be patient. "Aphids can multiply quickly, but in almost all cases ladybugs will show up and eat them."
- 3 Crank up the heat.** Composting is a worthy activity, but people aren't always able to stick with it, says Carole Kastler, owner of Camelot Design, who suggests buying a black plastic compost bin that has a hand crank for effortless turning. "The easier you make the process," says Kastler, "the more likely you'll keep doing it."
- 4 Or let someone else turn your compost.** If you're not interested in composting, Colorado businesses such as Oxford Recycling, A-1 Organics and Rooney Road Recycling Center accept yard waste for recycling and composting. "If you use a lawn service, ask if they recycle your yard waste," Kastler adds.
- 5 Lighten up.** Outdoor lighting enhances ambiance (and is necessary for safety), but it can also consume a lot of energy. Michael Hommel, founder and president of Designs by Sundown, recommends upgrading to LED lights, which "use 60 to 70 percent less energy and give off a crisper, higher-quality light."
- 6 Buy a smart sprinkler.** Johnson swears by the Rain Bird ESP-SMT Smart Irrigation Control System, a sprinkler system that can be programmed specifically to meet your yard's needs. "It factors in soil type, slope and amount of sun exposure," she says. "It can save up to 70 percent of water use."
- 7 Get professional help.** Kastler suggests calling in a landscaping pro to assess your yard for overall water usage, determine if an outdated sprinkler system can be replaced with a more efficient one, and analyze if plants are getting the right amount of water. "They're going to save you money and recoup the cost of their visit."
- 8 Cut the grass.** As in, cut it out of your yard. "Grass requires an enormous amount of water," Kastler says. "Determine how much grass you really need, then lose the rest and be creative with drought-tolerant plants." Some HOAs require a certain amount of grass in front yards, so check with yours before ripping up your lawn.
- 9 Click to get answers.** Visit alcc.com, the website of the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado, for useful information and advice, including a "tip of the week" and an "ask the expert" page where visitors can submit a specific landscaping question that will be answered by an expert in the appropriate field.
- 10 Make some friends.** Peck believes that beyond tips and techniques, homeowners need to develop a relationship with what's living and growing in their yard. "When you connect with the birds or butterflies, or if you grow something that you love to eat, you won't want to use toxic chemicals. Then the eco-friendly part takes care of itself." □