

Steward your land

© Marianne Simon, 2020

Congratulations! Your beautiful new garden is now installed. Your garden is alive (more alive now than ever) and it will need some tending to thrive. A newly planted garden requires some extra time and special attention to bring it to its full potential. Even after establishment, there is no such thing as a zero maintenance garden, so keep your eyes open and stay involved.

Add Organics. As mulch breaks down, add more! The easiest way to do this is to use falling leaves from your trees. A leaf-covered garden is a healthy garden! You can brush them off patios, walkways and stairs right onto the existing mulch. No falling leaves? You can get more mulch from your local composting facility, or order it from a local nursery or building supply yard. Remember to “chop it and drop it” when pruning.

Weed. You are going to have to weed, especially after the winter rains, and especially in the first year or two. Even with a thick layer of mulch, you may still have some weeds popping up. Be sure to eliminate them regularly, and then feed your soil some compost to improve the root systems of the plants. Consider cutting weeds down to the soil level rather than pulling out roots and disturbing the soil.

Water. Especially during the winters of the first two years after planting, you need to give your plants a little extra water. Not too much! Remember, these plants (and your soil) will be healthier, live longer, and grow stronger if you give them just enough water.

Prune. Get a good pair of hand clippers, gently prune trees, perennials, and grasses as needed. Mow your natural lawn annually after it has self-seeded to keep it clean and walkable. Don't mow it too short - look up the grasses and/or sedges that you used and follow growers' directions.

Maintain For Rain. Check downspout connections and overflows annually to make sure they're working properly. If you don't have gutters and downspouts, make sure there are no areas of erosion around your house. Consider adding a rain chain and small bit of gutter if you need to direct water away from a highly eroded area. Loosen your soil if it's become compacted. Remove and relocate extra soil or silt that's built up, and add mulch if needed.

Harvest. Fruits, vegetables, seeds and flowers - it's up to you to pick them when they're ready, before the birds and other creatures get them. If you have stiff competition in your neighborhood, invest in some bird netting or lightweight mesh bags and wrap your trees, vines, shrubs or the fruit itself a week or two before it's ready to harvest. Be sure to clean up and compost fallen fruit to limit pests.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM). A few aphids or caterpillars will feed the birds, but a massive infestation requires immediate action on your part. Remove diseased plant material and don't put it in your compost pile. Wash off unwanted insects with your hose. If they come back try spraying them with a mixture of mild dish soap and water, or with compost tea. Spread worm castings and mulch.

Go Out and Have Fun! By spending time relaxing and playing in your garden you will be more aware of how it's growing, how it changes, and what it needs.



Maintain Lawn Organically

If you decide to keep your grass, follow these guidelines to maintain it organically so that it will play nicely with the rest of your watershed wise landscape.

- Aerate and de-thatch annually
- Topdress annually with 1/8" - 1/4" good well-decomposed compost or worm castings
- Manage your irrigation
- Mow less frequently
- Maintain 3" - 4" height on cool season grass and 1-1/2" to 2" height on warm season grass
- Grass-cycle every time you mow or use a mulching mower
- Do not allow seed heads to form on the grass (remove if they do)
- Consider over-seeding with clover to turn it into a "Natural Lawn"
- Eliminate chemical inputs