



12 Tips: How To Garden Sustainably Anywhere

by Lois J. de Vries
©Sustainable Gardening Institute

Brought to you by



and

Plantskydd[®]

**RABBITS • DEER • VOLES
REPELLENT**

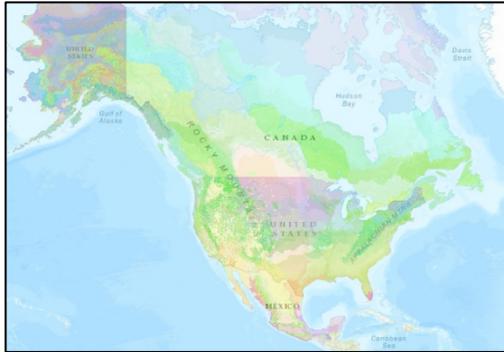


Sustainable gardening means using Nature's resources without using them up. We help you change the way you grow flowers and food by delivering Earth-friendly gardening, farming, and landscape advice from authoritative sources all in one place-- the [Sustainable Gardening Library](#). These tips will get you started by showing you 12 of the important changes you can make right now.

None of these tips takes a lot of time, but each of them makes a dramatic difference to our future.

SGI's founders care deeply about the future of our planet, other species with whom we share it, wise and respectful use of the land, and how our food is produced. We know you do, too.

Lois J. de Vries, Executive Director



North America boasts twenty- one USDA Plant Hardiness Zones and sub-zones (1a – 11b) and nearly 200 different ecoregions, so offering gardening advice is both interesting and

challenging. What grows well in the acid, rocky soils of the Appalachian forests will not be happy along the windswept, brackish marshes of the Pacific Coast.

When we say a garden is “sustainable,” we imply that it will stay the same without additional inputs of whatever keeps that garden going. One measure I like to suggest is: What would your garden look like if you came back from a two-month vacation in high summer? Without someone to take care of it while you're away.....

If it would be a disaster, with brown grass or ground cover, shrubs dropping their leaves, and perennials fried to a crisp, plants defoliated by insect pests, or decimated by disease, then your garden is not very sustainable. If, instead, it would look pretty much the same as when you left, except that it would be less tidy and everything would seem to have grown a few inches, then it's more sustainable.

Sustainable gardening practices can be incorporated into any garden style without affecting its beauty or design. It really is as simple as viewing our home landscapes as just one piece of a much larger ecosystem, being sensitive to the needs of other species, and being mindful of humanity's place in the web of life.

- Put the right plant in the right place.*** This is basic, no matter what kind of garden you're planning, but native plants are best adapted to local conditions and can often be grown with minimal soil additives or maintenance. Combine natives with your favorite ornamental or native-based hybrids to enjoy the best of both worlds. For example, rhododendron, azalea, and mountain laurel combine well with hydrangeas, since they all have similar growing requirements and will provide a nice succession of bloom. Check out our [Sustainable Gardening Library's Native Plant topic](#) to see what native plants our collaborators have listed for their regions.

- Make your own compost.*** Collect plant-based kitchen scraps, shredded paper, leaves, and other garden waste in an out-of-the-way spot and turn the pile frequently to avoid odors. Top dressing plants with your own compost will add essential nutrients, microbes, fungi, and other organisms back to the soil, reducing the need for commercial fertilizers.

- Mulch correctly.*** Two inches of wood or bark chips (or gravel in dry climates) should do it. And no "volcano mulch" around trees – it damages tree bark and causes feeder roots to grow into the mulch instead of into the ground. Proper mulching in planting beds eliminates weeds, keeps roots cool in summer and warm in winter, and reduces watering.

- Install a bioswale or gravel edge along the driveway and other hardscaping.*** This slows the flow of stormwater, holding it on your property and allowing it to percolate into the ground. That keeps the soil moist and reduces the need for supplementary watering. Some towns that require solid paving allow gravel or permeable paving on longer driveways, provided that the first 25 feet are asphalt.

- Downsize or eliminate your lawn.*** Consider planting low- or no-mow grasses and sedges, or low-growing, well-behaved groundcovers, such as native Allegheny spurge, or Tufted Evening Primrose in arid regions, around the lawn edge. Reduce the size of your lawn by replacing some of it with beds of shrubs or drought-tolerant perennials.

- Leave the leaves.*** Use a mulching mower to chop tree leaves where they fall (they won't hurt the lawn.). Use leaves for compost, or rake them into flower and shrub beds. On larger properties, rake them into a brush pile. Rotting leaves not only provide natural food for your garden plants, but also shelter for butterfly eggs, bumble bees, woolly bear and other caterpillars, lizards, spiders, salamanders, frogs, toads, and other beneficial garden residents.

- Keep dried stalks of decorative grasses and perennials in place.*** Native mason bees and other insects lay their eggs inside the hollow stems of hydrangeas, phlox, hibiscus, New York ironweed, hostas and many other common garden plants. Their stalks also add visual interest to the winter garden.

- Water plants only when they need it.*** Hand watering with a watering can or hose, drip irrigation, or soaker hoses are best. Use a rain gauge and only water when necessary (weekly if there's been no rainfall in temperate areas; every 14 - 30 days for desert-adapted gardens). Conserve water by re-directing it from gutter downspouts into shrub beds, a bioswale, cistern, or rain barrel, and consider installing a rain garden if you have a low-lying area on your property.

- Eliminate pesticides whenever possible.*** Learn to live with minor insect damage and wait to see whether natural predators take care of the pests. If not, try using a water sprayer that uses high pressure to flush bugs away without damaging tender plants.

- Don't plant invasive species.*** Invasive Species Strike Teams, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and a number of states list landscape plants that shouldn't be used even though you may see them for sale at garden centers.

- Add landscape lighting only when and where it's needed.*** Skyglow, or light pollution, affects the inner clocks of bugs, birds, and other animals, as well as plants. Garden lights should have shades or be directed downward, and turned off when you aren't outdoors.

- Become active in your local community.*** Many homeowner association rules and town ordinances have not been reviewed in decades. Discuss with local authorities to see whether they can reasonably be adapted to embrace current sustainable landscape practices.

**Want to help support the
SUSTAINABLE GARDENING
LIBRARY?**



[Make a donation](#)

[Like our Facebook page](#)

Use the Library in your classroom

Integrate the Library into your work

Link to us on your webpage, newsletter, etc.

Thank you!

Contact:

973-383-0497

L.devries@sustainablegardeninginstitute.org



Visit:

[The Sustainable Gardening Institute](#)

[The Sustainable Gardening Library](#)

