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No Lawns Design

Many people struggle with the design aspect of no-lawns. Removing lawn-space is a great idea if it's not being used, but what do you replace it with? This page is dedicated to resources to help with designing a no-lawn yard.

1. Resources

1.1 North America

- **Wild Ones Garden Designs** - These should really be called yard designs since they show real yards that have been designed to be practical while also including a ton of native species. If you live in between several of the cities here, take a look at all of them and see which plants are native in your area. From Wild Ones: Each design
 - includes at least 15 or more native plant species
 - uses multiples of plants rather than "specimen" plantings to be consistent with building attractive pollinator gardens per Xerces and other science-based pollinator advocates.
 - favors species with long and staggered bloom times to enhance the ornamental nature of the gardens and provide pollen and nectar through the season.
 - includes considerations concerning soil (type/texture, pH, etc.), and other conditions (moisture, sunlight) typical for the specific ecoregion)
 - includes an incremental approach to developing the plan, adding new areas and native plant species as time and funds permit.
- **The Living Landscape** by Darke and Tallamy is a great book for the eastern half of NA. One of my favorite native plant books and shows off a ton of examples of native plant gardens.
- **Prairie Up!** by Ben Vogt is one of the few books that actually takes a no-lawns approach and shows you how to do it.

1.2 Europe / UK

- **Naturalistic Planting Design** by Nigel Dunnett. Mostly UK based. Not strictly focused on native plants, but makes good points about design. He's also very active on Instagram.
- **Piet Oudolf** has written multiple books on designing natural gardens. He's a Dutch gardener but his work is broadly focused on increasing biodiversity in our landscapes.

2. Design Strategies

Define your spaces

It can be really helpful to take the time to assess how you currently use your landscape before you start making big changes. Our **No Mow May guide** has a great strategy for discovering the areas

that you use for recreation vs areas that can be dedicated to native plantings.

Identify your constants and expected changes

In any landscape, you'll have a few features that are very unlikely to change over time (or at least, won't change for a long time).

A few examples from my yard:

- **The house:** The foundation is where it is. Gas lines going to the house, the dryer vent, downspouts, utilities; these are all things that are unlikely to change much throughout the lifespan of the house.
- **White Oak:** I have a young white oak in my front yard. This species of oaks is resistant to storm damage and relatively disease resistant. With a natural lifespan of ~400 years, this plant is the only one in my yard that has a good chance to outlive me.
- **Grade:** Water flows down hill. While grade can sometimes be changed slightly, it's unlikely to change much without a bunch of permit pulling and expense. For me, this is likely a constant. Areas of my yard that are lowest and consistently wet will likely stay that way.

Likewise, there are things you can predict will happen at some point in the future:

- New roof for the house
- utility lines getting replaced
- fences getting replaced, added, or removed.

These are things to keep in mind when making a plan.

3. Know your region's Keystone Species

The National Wildlife Federation has great data here on which plant genera are most essential for wildlife in each region of North America (if anyone knows of similar data for other areas, message the mods). Landscapes that have these plants will provide habitat to native insects, birds, and animals that cannot exist in a normal yard.

The Audubon Society has a great article here which explains how native plants ⇒ native insects ⇒ native birds.

4. Draw a plan!

We aren't aware of any landscaping software that is easy to learn for beginners. If you know of one, let us know!

A low-tech option I've done in the past:

1. Pull up google maps and print an aerial view of the yard.
2. Trace the dimensions of the yard, house, and any static features. Anything you figure is there regardless of choices you make.

3. Scan this and save it as a PDF. This is now a nice template of your yard.
 4. Now you can print out several of these templates, draw out ideas of what you *could* do, and compare them side by side.
 5. If you have a steady hand, you can also just try free hand drawing your yard and then scanning it. I found both of these methods to be faster than drawing a template in SketchUp.
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Last update: **2026/07/08 21:05**

