

HOW TO DESIGN & CREATE A LOW-MAINTENANCE LANDSCAPE



**TAKING A LITTLE USED AREA AND MAKING IT INTO
A LOW MAINTENANCE GARDEN**

My Family and I have lived in our home for 35+ years. In that time the backyard has gone through many transformations. Recently I had been asked to create a low maintenance garden for a handicapped friend. I realized that the resulting plan would be a good way to create a low-maintenance area in our own backyard landscape.

Our home sits on an medium sized city lot. Both the front the back areas are in constant use. On either side of the house the property consists of two long thin strips of about 15'w by 45'L. The South side has a gate that leads into the back yard and is used frequently. We have put all our storage sheds there for easy access. The North side is just a dead end strip of property which is 10'w by 48'L. Historically this was an area little used and the repository of all the plants that I didn't know what to do with. About 25 yrs ago I had put in some groundcover, *Potentilla neumanniana*, and a sprinkler system. This groundcover has since taken over the whole backyard landscape. So, note to self, check invasiveness of groundcover before planting. That coupled with the planting of all the orphan plants had created a little used hodgepodge of a garden.

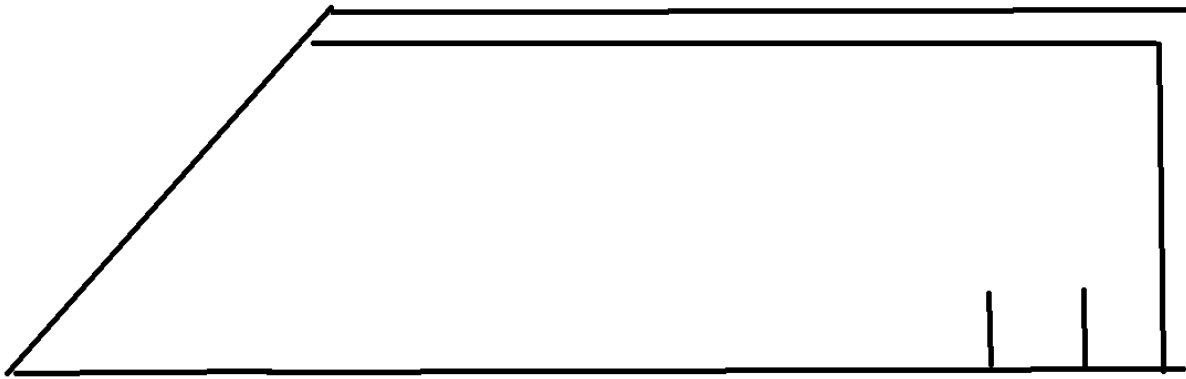
The plan that I had created for my friend called for the surface area to be done in compacted decomposed granite and raised beds, stock troughs in this case, for the planting areas. The decomposed granite is a permeable surface that allows the rainwater to percolate through to the aquifer rather than running off into the gutters. It is also a good surface for wheeled vehicles like a wheelchair or a wheel barrow (Note: if you have hardwood floors this surface might not be a good choice for you as the tiny bits of stone tend to get wedged in the tread of your shoes. When tracked into the house they can scratch the hardwood.) We chose the stock troughs for their durability and the 'look'. Plus the added advantage of them being the correct height for a seated person to work the plantings they contain. The getting down on my knees isn't so bad it's the getting up from that position that is becoming harder as I age. Since I am not getting in younger I thought this would be a great solution to this problem area in our landscape. Providing good drainage as well as ease of access with minimal upkeep required.

So make a plan.....limited only by imagination and that sticky one....funds.

Research.....you can't do too much!

Pull the plug. Do It!

Area: 8' wide by 42' long



SUPPLIES:

BLUE ROCK = 1 ½ YD (2 IN. DEEP)

DECOMPOSED GRANITE = 2 ½ YD. (2 IN. DEEP)

(Leave math to professionals.....I second guessed them and had left over EXACTLY the amount that I added to their calculations.)

Landscape timbers & stakes

Irrigation supplies-line/supports/connectors/ends

Galvanized water troughs

Cost of supplies:

-landscape timber	\$ 67.05
-irrigation supplies	\$ 53.79
-plastic for surplus soil	\$ 55.64
-blue rock	\$218.13
-decomposed granite w/stablizer	\$ 500.00
-stock troughs	\$ 900.00
_____ -hole saw for troughs	<u>\$ 30.00</u>
Total	\$1824.61

(Note: additional costs would be the purchase of gravel/soil/plants for planters)

Time to complete:

-6 weeks; approx 50 hrs of labor

Tools needed:

shovel/gloves/wheelbarrow

tamper/roller

string/measuring tape/level/stakes/pencil/paper

edging.....brick/plastic/hammer

Templates of raised beds

Hole saw to drill bottom of troughs

BEFORE



Area to be re-done.

STEP ONE:

Create garden bed area all along entire length of fence and line with landscape timbers.



-string a plumb line

-dig trench for landscape timbers



Lay the landscape timbers equidistant from the fence.

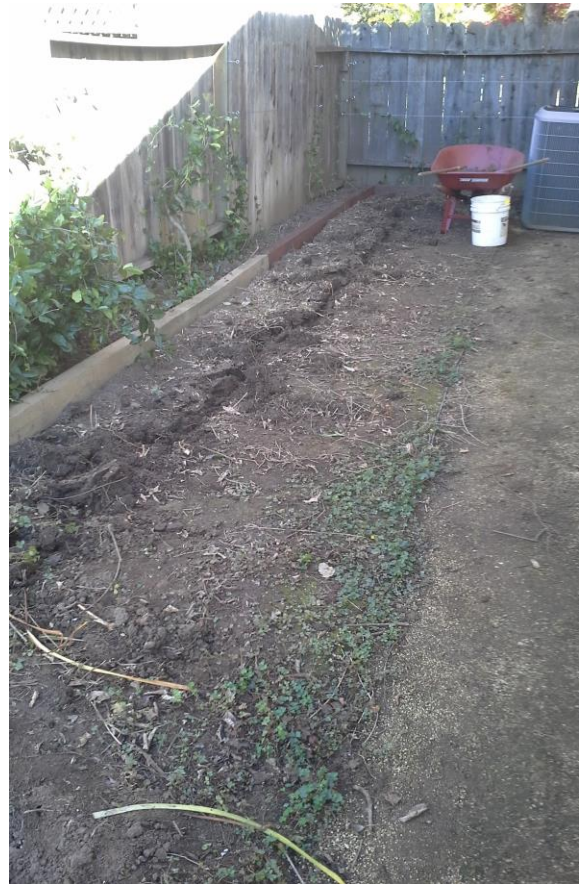
-make sure timbers are level



garden area defined

-Time for general cleanup & removal of existing plantings.

-Remove existing irrigation lines



STEP TWO: SOIL REMOVAL

Dig entire area down 4 inches saving soil to refill planters

Lay plastic down to contain soil removed from area



Cover soil to keep from running in the rain and to maybe start some solarization



STEP TWOa: DEALING WITH A DOWNSPOUT



If you have a downspout that empties into the area you must make plans for where that runoff will drain to. I dug down about 4" creating a long trench and filled it with rocks and gravel to create a French Drain. When I put down the blue rock I made sure to incorporate that trench into the plan by paying special attention to the area when tamping & rolling. When the Decomposed Granite was spread out I did the same. That way there will not be a sinkhole in that area. I am happy to report that during the rainy season it performed great!

STEP THREE: PLANTER/IRRIGATION PLACEMENT

Cut templates of planters and move around as needed to make sure of sun coverage and location of irrigation lines. Allow for enough room between and around for wheelbarrow use.



NOTES:

-Fun fact.....if you go out a midnight during a full moon wherever the moonlight falls is where the sunlight will fall in six months time. So in Jan the moonlight will indicate where the sunlight will fall in June; Feb for July and so on.

-Consider the grade of your area. Where is the rainwater going to run off to. I choose to make any runoff from my area go right down the middle so any runoff runs away from our house and not into the neighbor's yard.

STEP FOUR: LAY THE IRRIGATION LINES



Lay the irrigation lines using measurements determined from the placement of the planter templates



Stub off the lines where the planters will be placed

STEP FIVE: BLUE ROCK LAYER

Lay down blue rock and distribute to 2 inches deep. Wet thoroughly. Allow to sit 24 hours



STEP SIX: ROLL THE BLUE ROCK

Tools for the job:

- water filled drum roller
- tamper tool for corners and edges

How to:

- key is roll it slowly back and forth. Allow the roller to do the work. For the best results pull the roller towards you rather than push it away from your body.
- tamp down any areas the roller can't reach and the around the edges
- surface becomes very firm with little or no give when walked upon when correctly done



Rolled
Blue rock



STEP **SEVEN: DECOMPOSED** **GRANITE LAYER**

- Decomposed granite with a stabilizer added at supplier
- distributed and spread out to 2 inches thick.
- Wet thoroughly 3-4 separate times
- approx every 3 hours
- allow to sit 24 hours after last wetting



Roll decomposed granite with the same method as that used on the blue rock

Decomposed granite & stubbed off irrigation lines are now ready for placement of planters

STEP EIGHT: **PLANTERS PUT IN** **PLACE**

-The stock troughs will need holes drilled in their bottoms for drainage. This is a two person job. The troughs are constructed to last outdoors for a very long time so don't plan on the drilling process to be easy. We purchased a special 2" diamond drill and a $\frac{3}{4}$ " drill bit made especially for drilling metal and still had to spray the contact point of drill and trough with water to keep the drill bit from overheating. It took almost 2 full minutes each to drill the 2" holes (to accommodate the irrigation line) and almost a minute to drill each of the $\frac{3}{4}$ " drainage holes (10 drainage holes per trough). The location of the 2" hole is determined by the placement of the trough in the landscaped area. I used the paper patterns to ascertain the location, marked the spot and transferred the mark to the trough. We then wrapped the cut edge of the 2" hole with a cut $\frac{1}{4}$ "

irrigation line to avoid that sharp edge from cutting the irrigation line if any movement of the trough should occur once it was placed in the landscape.

I have not removed the paper labels on each trough and I will. I quite like the heavier plastic red labels so I think I will leave those.



THOUGHTS & CONCLUSIONS

- The project will be completed when spring arrives
- The planters are in place and await filling with blue rock, soil and plants.
- I will:
 - fill the bottom of each trough with 3" of blue rock
 - cover the blue rock with a layer of weed barrier cloth. This will prevent the soil mixture from sifting down and mixing with the blue rock
 - fill remainder of trough to about 2" from rim with a 50/50 mixture of the reserved soil that was removed from the site and added compost

-I will then, using the sunlight exposure information I researched, chose plantings that will thrive in the area.

-Irrigation lines & emitters will be placed and a timer attached to the line (run prior to the blue rock step) and hooked to a hose bib as a last step

Would I do this again.....maybe. Now that it is all done I am very pleased with the resulting 'look' and ease of care. It must be said, though, that at times during the project I wondered just what I had gotten myself into. There is another area of our landscape that would also do well with this application so I guess I'll have to decide at some point whether to expend the effort or not. For now I am just going to enjoy my new area.