

# Real World Landscape Decisions

## BENEFICIAL LANDSCAPES

Christina Hoyt

In general, our landscapes are far from beneficial. The EPA defines beneficial as natural or native landscaping that “balances our needs and sense of beauty with those of nature (our ecosystems) because, in the long run, they are interrelated.” Beneficial landscapes are intentionally created to protect existing natural areas, conserve resources such as energy and water, capture and provide ecosystem services, increase biodiversity and improve water quality and soil health.



Trying to do that can seem overwhelming—either way too much work or way too much money. Is there a way to improve our landscapes little by little rather than with one initial and possibly overwhelming expense of time and energy? Here are some incremental stages of landscape changes that might be a little more doable. If your resources are limited, it won’t be a “fast landscape” but in the environmental world—as in food and many other places, fast is rarely the best guideline.

The suggestions below range in cost from “dead broke” to expenses of about \$1,000.

Budget	Kendall Weyers	Bob Henrickson	Christina Hoyt	Justin Evertson
Dead Broke	Start a compost pile with basic homeowner tools and salvaged materials.	Build up my soil with whatever materials I can find—leaves, grass clippings, kitchen waste, straw, manure.	Mow less frequently; get plant divisions from friends.	Relax on mowing, get free mulch, beg plants from friends and plant an acorn (eight shade trees in my yard were started from acorns).
\$100	Plant a vegetable garden so I can feed my family and put any waste back into next year’s garden.	Buy some tree and shrub seedlings (they will grow!).	Add compost to landscape beds and purchase some high-impact shrubs with great habitat value.	Buy a wheelbarrow and shovel to build soil and move plants.
\$500	Buy a reel lawn mower (\$100-\$500) and a few fruit trees.	Install a perennial garden and add more shrubs to my landscape.	Buy a small grow-bag shade tree, more shrubs and a small-growing native tree, like serviceberry or pawpaw.	For under \$500, I’ve already done this—built a shade frame, compost bin and area to start new plants.
\$1,000	Tear out the existing privet, Alberta spruce and hydrangea shrubs in my front yard and replace them with more beneficial plants.	Buy bigger-sized plants.	Install a rain garden to capture rainwater and add more plants for seasonal interest.	Do all the above and replace a third of my lawn with perennials. With the \$500 left over, I’d go to the Smoky Mountains and hug some of the ancient trees there.

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PHOTO: This 3-year-old sycamore was planted small but is growing fast, as much as 5 feet in its third year.