

# My Yard – July

## Manageable Landscapes

Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, [plantnebraska.org](http://plantnebraska.org)

Mid-summer is a good check for our landscapes. How do things look? Are new plants filling in? What takes the most time and maintenance? No matter the size or condition of the yard, most gardeners want landscapes that provide a maximum of enjoyment with minimal effort. For many of us, one of the main questions is... are we just working in our gardens or are we enjoying them?

Selecting the right plants and putting them in the right place can go a long way toward enjoying them all through the year, whether we're just walking through them or up to our knees working in them.

- Group plants that need similar conditions. Woody plants are used to growing close together and protecting one another from extreme weather. Massing plants with similar needs for moisture, care, exposure and soil type will shelter them, minimize mower damage and reduce the need for watering.
- Right tree, right place, right way. For maximum growth and vigor, select good quality trees that match the site, avoid utility lines and are planted at the correct depth.
- Plant deciduous trees and shrubs west, south and east of buildings for summer shade and plant evergreens north or northwest of buildings to decrease winter winds. Conifers are most effective planted away from buildings at a distance of 1-3 times the height of the trees. Correctly placed trees can lower air conditioning bills 15-50 percent and heating bills 25-40 percent.
- Carefully prune trees while they are still young to help them develop good branch structure—they're much harder to prune when they're older and taller.
- Either space plants close together, mulch them or plant groundcovers beneath (anything lower than the "focus" plants, which may be quite tall) to conserve water, decrease temperature fluctuations, reduce weeds and increase organic matter. For trees, keep mulch away from the trunk and mulch to the dripline.
- To minimize maintenance, use shrubs that look best unpruned.
- Compost garden debris and use it on-site to improve soil and limit waste.
- Include a diversity of plants, including native plants, for hardiness, pest and disease resistance, four season interest and to provide food and shelter for wildlife and pollinators.

