

Sustainable landscape design for your property can be easier than you may think

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Making your property more sustainable is a trend that seems to get more interest from homeowners every year.

Many small changes can greatly improve sustainability and can be fairly simple to do, according to an Iowa State University horticulture expert.

Ann Marie VanDerZanden, professor in the Department of Horticulture and co-author, with Thomas Cook, of the recently published book "Sustainable Landscape Management: Design, Construction, and Maintenance," defines sustainability as minimizing inputs -- such as water, fertilizer and time -- on your landscape.

"If homeowners look at what they already have in their yard, they are often surprised at how a few, small changes can make a difference," she said. "It can be as easy as switching out a few plants from ones that require lots of inputs, to ones that don't."

VanDerZanden says roses are a good example. Many types of the flower require spraying for insects and disease, protection from the cold, and other input costs.

"If you like roses," says VanDerZanden, "the alternative might be to put in a shrub rose. It won't have the same overall structure, but it will give you roses that you can cut and bring inside and enjoy, but they require much less inputs."

Plants that grow well in Iowa can be found at most nurseries or garden

centers. Many times the tags on the plants will tell if the plants are disease or insect resistant and will work in your climate and [soil type](#).

Iowa is generally situated in hardiness temperate zones 4 (north of Interstate 80) and 5 (south of I-80).

A major part of being sustainable is capturing water as it moves through your landscape, according to VanDerZanden.

For those who are ready to undertake larger projects, VanDerZanden says driveways, sidewalks and patios are great places to make sustainable improvements.

Using water-permeable concrete when installing your paved areas allows water to filter down through the pavement and get into the soil below. From there it enters the [ground water](#), she said.

Also, using permeable pavers or rough-laid stones that have gaps when you install them allows water to stay in the ground and not run off, causing soil erosion or flooding once it gets into the storm sewers.

While some larger projects such as replacing pavement are dependent on weather, there is really no bad time to get started, she says.

"Spring and fall are both excellent times to start," she said. "You can even do it in the summer if you are careful to give the plants enough water."

Whatever the size of the project the homeowner chooses, VanDerZanden says, "It doesn't have to be a huge, daunting task. Baby steps will still get you there."

Provided by Iowa State University

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