



EASY

By Jeanine Matlow Landscape photos by Gene Meadows

A beautiful garden can be a source of pride and joy. The only caveat is that caring for it requires more hours in the day than most of us have to spare. It's possible to achieve the perfect balance with a low-maintenance landscape that lets you reap the rewards with less work.

Nature's Way

As Lyn Duffy explains, the definition of low maintenance will mean something different to everyone. "There's a wide range of what that means to the client," says the landscape designer and landscape management coordinator for Four Seasons Garden Center in Oak Park; photos of two of her projects shown above, this page.

"One might want to do nothing but have someone come out twice a month to do weeding, and another might not enjoy pruning," Duffy says. "No matter what, you will always have to do some type of maintenance."

You can lighten your load by selecting plants with low water and fertilizer requirements. Adding an irrigation system and drip lines for your containers will cut down on maintenance.

"Besides an occasional weeding or deadheading, you just let them be," Duffy says. "We usually try to focus on something slow growing or a dwarf variety. It's really important to put the right plant in the right site."

Another solution is to let your plants

take their natural form. "Instead of giving boxwoods a very neat and clean hedge look, you really can just let them go," Duffy says.

Low-maintenance plantings include ornamental grasses, flowering shrubs and evergreens. "Sedum is very low maintenance, too. You don't need to fertilize them, and they don't need a lot of water," she says.

But, perennials can be deceiving. "They are really a little bit more maintenance than people think," Duffy says.

Lawns are considered a low-maintenance feature. Duffy suggests mowing the grass a little higher to shade out the weeds. "It doesn't eliminate them, but it does help," she adds.

Apply slow-release fertilizer to your plants once in the spring, so they'll require less maintenance. Mulch is a great way to hold on to moisture. Using ground covers to fill your beds means you don't have to mulch every year.

Decorative accents are a refreshing alternative. "We recommend garden art or sculptures if someone wants a wow factor,

rather than water features that require more care," she says.

Duffy says she has noticed a recent pattern of young couples buying homes in established neighborhoods. "These young professionals don't have time to maintain the gardens of the original homeowners that had a lot of perennials and beds," she says. "We remove the original plantings and replace them with low-maintenance landscaping."

She adds, "Gardens take time. You can have someone else take care of them for you, but even solid concrete will have a weed come through. Nature is nature. It's always going to come through."



Lyn Duffy