

Samples from

Native Species Redesign of Landscaping Plan and DIY Installation Instructions

for Single Family Residence in the Southeastern US

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I. Introduction

Installing one's own landscape is like catering one's own wedding: one must enlist friends to help, and one must be mindful of one's own and one's helpers' abilities. It will require lots of logistical planning, as you will have to buy your plants, mulch, and any tools you need; arrange for these things to be delivered to your house; move the entire quantity to the appropriate locations in your yard; and prepare the soil and do the planting fairly quickly lest the plants weaken.

If you hire a crew, then the company will take responsibility for all of this. But of course, hiring a crew is likely to cost more, and you will not have the pleasure of personally creating the garden in which you live. Given enough people willing to sweat, you should be able to install most or all of your landscaping plan without hired help.

By taking the landscape plan in stages, you can make the work more manageable. Toward this end, I have divided the landscape into areas, each of which may be installed separately. The areas may be installed in any order; however, it is important to install the stone walk before you begin to prepare planting areas. Installing a walkway often involves displacing a lot of dirt, and sometimes heavy equipment. With the walkway done first, you will not have to worry about plants being trampled and prepared soil becoming compacted.

What follows in Section II is an overview of the work that you will do for each area. Section III discusses the logistics of doing the installation yourself. Section IV lists the tools you will need to complete the project, and Section V suggests roles that a professional crew might play if you wish. Finally, Sections VI and VII show detailed planting instructions for each area and a map of the areas.

utility lines. Do not dig over these lines.

2. REMOVE SOD: Remove sod in the area you are about to plant only. Sod may be rolled and kept moist if you wish to replant it.
3. SOIL PREPARATION: Check soil. If it is hard to dig with a shovel, use a tiller to break up the soil to a depth of 1 foot, or deeper if the plants' roots are larger. If there is a lot of clay, add mulch, compost, or topsoil. I do not recommend adding fertilizers to a native plant plot, as it will only make the plants unrealistically optimistic about their growth potential. We do not want to dash their hopes – and growth forms – later on.

To amend clay soils, add about 3 inches of mulch, topsoil, or compost over the entire area and till it into the ground. Measure the square footage on the plan (rough measurements are fine), and divide by 108 to get the number of cubic yards of material you need. Keep this number handy for your mulch order, as mulch is also spread 3 inches thick.

4. PLANTING ORDER:
 - a. Plant trees and large shrubs before small perennials and groundcovers. See tree planting instructions on the Little & Little Planting Plan. To manage large heavy trees, you may want to hire a crew. If so, I recommend having all of the trees installed on one day, regardless of which area you are installing first, to save on cost.
 - b. Apart from trees and large shrubs, install plants from the farthest side of the bed to the nearest side of the bed. This way, you will not need to work around the plants that are already planted.
5. PLANTING BEDS: When planting many plants together in a bed, lay them out before you plant them.
 - a. Use a garden hose to outline the shapes of the beds. Once you are satisfied with the shapes, mark the bed edges with surveying flags.
 - b. Check the spacing requirements on the plant's label.
 - c. Arrange all of the plants that belong in the bed inside the surveying flags.

III. Sample Work Schedule

Each area of the landscape plan will probably take at least a weekend to install, and it may take longer if there is bad weather or if you have few helpers. Each installation will keep four or five people busy at once, with breaks and without having them step on each other. If you have four or five people willing to work, I recommend doing something like this:

Before the weekend:

Call 811 and ask that your underground utilities be marked. Call 10-14 days before your work weekend.

Locate plants for the area that you will be installing. Find out which ones you can pick up locally, and which ones may need to be shipped. When you have decided where you will buy each plant, place your orders. For local plants, ask whether the nursery can have your order assembled for you on Saturday morning.

Strip up a test patch of sod. Use a shovel to dig into the dirt about a foot. If it is soft enough to dig, you are ready. If it is mostly clay, or otherwise very hard, call to rent a tiller. Explain to the employee on the phone that you want to dig up clay soil to a depth of one foot, and you will need a tiller equal to the job. Ask whether the tiller will fit into a standard automobile, an SUV, or a pickup truck.

If the soil is mostly clay, plan on buying topsoil or compost. The most economical way to do this is by the cubic yard at a professional landscape supply depot (I use Triangle Landscape Supply on Cornwallis Road). Some pickup trucks will not hold a full yard, but the nice people at TLS will sell you half a yard at a time. They also deliver to our area. Alternately, you can buy it by the 40 lb. bag at almost any nursery.

Consider how you will move the plants and the tiller, if needed, to your property. A friend with a pickup truck is an excellent choice, if available.