

YardSmart

# Basics

Being YardSmart is about enjoying an inviting, beautiful yard that's low-maintenance, low-cost and easy on the environment.



In partnership with

CALGARY  
HORTICULTURAL  
SOCIETY

# Steps to success

Following seven basic YardSmart principles will set you up for gardening success in Calgary.

## 1 Good soil, and lots of it, makes happy plants

Soil that's nutritious, water-retentive and well-drained is the key to a healthy, beautiful garden.

In Calgary, original soil is heavy in either clay or sand. Clay is nutrient-rich, but slow draining, while sand is quick draining, but has trouble retaining nutrients and moisture.

Good soil for plants has equal parts sand, silt and clay; it retains water but doesn't stay soggy.

Here's a simple way to determine your soil type:

Take a handful of moist (but not wet) soil from your garden and give it a firm squeeze. Open your hand and observe.

- If it holds its shape and, when given a light poke, crumbles, you have luxurious loam.
- If it holds its shape and sits stubbornly in your hand when poked, you have clay soil.
- If it falls apart as soon as you open your hand, you have sandy soil.

## 2 Shrink your lawn to shrink work time, costs and water use

Where it makes sense, replace your lawn with low-maintenance shrubs, flowers and groundcovers. For locations where you need lawn, use drought-tolerant grass seed or sod available at your local garden centre.

## 3 Design your garden to save water

- Group plants with similar water needs together. You'll save time by only watering the plants that need it and avoid drowning those that don't.
- Slope flowerbeds. Place plants needing the most water at the lowest part of the slope.
- Place and shape flowerbeds so sprinkler systems and soaker hoses can easily reach them.

You can find more tips and tools for planning your yard in the YardSmart Planning and Design brochure.

## 4 Put the right plant in the right place

Choosing a location that suits a plant's growing needs means it will be healthier and better able to fight disease and pests.

Find areas in your yard where water runs naturally and place thirstier plants there. Use drier spots for drought resistant, non-invasive plants in both native and well-adapted species. Designated hardiness zones help you choose plants that are most likely to thrive in your region. For Calgary, choose plants labelled Hardiness Zone 2 or 3.

When drought tolerant plants are planted in the right spot they can generally survive with little water once established, usually after the first two years.



YardSmart basics will help you enjoy a healthy, beautiful yard.



Happy plants need good soil.

YardSmart garden with Echinacea.



Don't plant or nurture invasive species. This will spare you heavy weeding while protecting our parks, wetlands and waterways. Check out the Alberta Native Plant Council's invasive plant information at [anpc.ab.ca](http://anpc.ab.ca).

## 5 Mulch gives beauty that's above and below the surface

Mulch is a layer of organic material (such as compost, shredded wood or bark) or inorganic material (such as pea gravel) that is spread on top of soil. It creates a healthy, attractive yard that requires less water and weeding by:

- preventing water evaporation
- adding nutrients to the soil
- attracting worms that help aerate your soil
- helping prevent erosion
- keeping weeds in check

Use two to four inches of mulch on top of the beds, leaving an inch around the base of your plants. Replenish every two years.

**Whatever soil type you have, adding compost to your soil is the best way to improve it. Also, your local garden centre is a great resource for more information on how to improve your soil.**

**Having a good depth of quality soil ensures your plants can access more water. A layer of at least six to eight inches of good quality soil is recommended.**



Where it makes sense, replace your lawn with low-maintenance shrubs, flowers and groundcovers.

For walkways, patios and driveways, use surfaces that allow water to be absorbed. Materials like porous pavers, flagstone and gravel help rain soak into the soil and reduce the amount of rainwater running into our rivers via storm drains.

## 6 Watering wisely

- Avoid watering in the heat of the day. Use a timer to set your sprinkler to water early in the morning.
- Avoid watering when it has rained or is forecast to rain, or when it's windy.
- Consider using underground sprinklers along with rain sensors. They require an up front investment but can offset the cost due to lower water usage in the long run.
- Direct water to flower beds and trees with downspout extenders or soaker hoses attached to rain barrels.
- Irrigate plant roots directly with drip hoses or soaker hoses nestled in mulch. Use a rain gauge and soil moisture sensor to monitor water use.
- Don't let sprinklers mist. Larger water drops are less likely to evaporate and get blown away, ensuring they reach their intended destination.
- Give your plants only the water they need.

## 7 Catch rainwater

- Save money by using a rain barrel or two to capture rainwater. Your plants will love the soft, non-chlorinated water.
- Direct your downspouts toward absorbent surfaces like lawn or pea gravel to ultimately be absorbed by nearby plants, shrubs and trees.
- Use rock-filled trenches or faux rivers to direct rainwater from downspouts to plants.
- Build rain gardens, which are shallow depressions with deep amended soil designed to hold and soak up water from your roofs and driveways. Learn more at [calgary.ca/yardsmart](http://calgary.ca/yardsmart).

Visit [calgary.ca/yardsmart](http://calgary.ca/yardsmart) for information and additional tips on soil, mulch, plants, lawn care, rain gardens and much more. Want a few tools and tips on designing a yard? Check out our **YardSmart Planning and Design** brochure.

The **Calgary Horticultural Society, (calhort.org)** is another great online source of information for gardening success in Calgary.



Left to right: Choosing a porous pathway surface helps keep rainwater in your yard so plants can absorb it. Rain barrels are good for the environment and are easy on your wallet. Direct downspouts toward your lawn or absorbent landscaping so they aren't channeling runoff onto driveways, streets or alleys.