

YardSmart Planning & Design

A few planning and design tips can help you create a beautiful yard that's low maintenance, lower cost and easy on the environment.



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Steps to success

Following ten YardSmart planning and design principles will set you up for gardening success in Calgary.

Step 1. Sketch out the basics

Start by making an initial scale drawing of your existing site. It doesn't have to be perfect, but using a scale, such as making each grid square equal about two feet, will help.

The first things to draw on the map are:

- where north is
- your property lines

When planning a garden or yard, you should refer to your Real Property Report, which is usually with your mortgage documents. It's a map of your yard and shows your property and utility lines.

Step 2. Get to know your yard

Take some time and walk around your yard to get to know it. Make note of what you find. Add to your sketch the existing features, such as your house, garage and walkways using the site analysis checklist provided.

Pay attention to sunlight exposure, watch for this at different times of day and make a note of sunny and shady areas, particularly if you have existing trees. Consider views from inside your house and perhaps views beyond your yard that you would like to block.

Consider drainage. Do you have an area in the yard where water doesn't drain well, tends to pool or stays wet? Make a note of it so you can take advantage of that spot by choosing a plant that enjoys wet feet.

This is your base drawing and you'll continue to build on it, so it is helpful to make a number of copies.

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Step 3. Prioritize your landscape needs and wants

The best garden is one that makes you happy and comfortable. Think about your current and future needs and wants. This will help you maximize your garden enjoyment over many years.

Step 4. Consider maintenance requirements

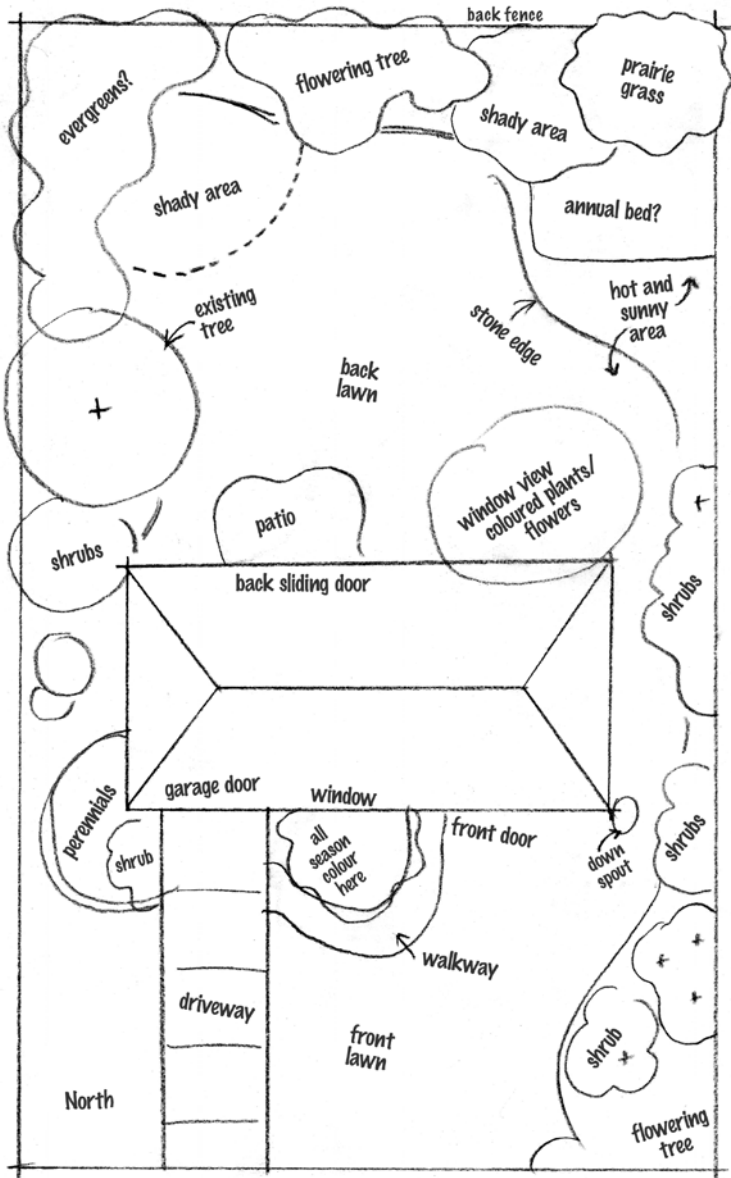
Thoughtful design combined with low maintenance plants and hardscapes (patios, walkways, etc.) will reduce maintenance time. For example:

- Avoid steeply sloped lawn areas as they are difficult to mow.
- Trees and shrubs tend to require less care than lawns or annuals and perennials.
- Think about high traffic areas where grass or plants will be difficult to establish and maintain. In these cases, walkways made out of permeable surfaces such as flagstone are a good choice.

Step 5. Determine a budget

Decide how much you would like to spend on your yard. Remember - you don't have to do it all at once! Build your plan so that it can be done in phases over the course of a number of seasons.





Basic sketch. Steps 1 – 7: Map out your yard and consider future wants and needs.

Step 6. Identify how you would like to use different locations in your yard

Think about areas you would like to use for entertainment, play or that private spot you'd like for your hammock. Maybe you want an area to grow vegetables? Consider areas for your pets, storage and ease of access into your house. Areas like the front yard are typically used to frame your home and give it curb appeal, but consider other options like the addition of a small seating area.

Step 7. Start your design

Using your base diagram, circle and note the use areas you have identified. Begin thinking about ways to organize and build out these spaces.

Step 8. Refine your sketch

Begin to refine your sketch by drawing in the elements you would like to see in each area you just identified. Trees, shrubs, plants, walkways, fountains, privacy screens, etc. Again, don't worry, it doesn't have to be perfect and you don't need to know the specific plants at this stage – noting trees or a shrub will do.

Have fun envisioning and playing with your sketch. Visit the library or calgary.ca/yardsmart for suggestions about inspirational local gardens to visit.

Plan with water management in mind:

- Group plants with similar water needs together.
Save time by only watering the plants that need it; avoid over watering those that don't.
- Slope flowerbeds. Plan so that plants needing the most water are at the lowest part of the slope.
- Consider how you'll be watering and place and shape your beds so sprinkler systems and soaker hoses can easily accommodate them.



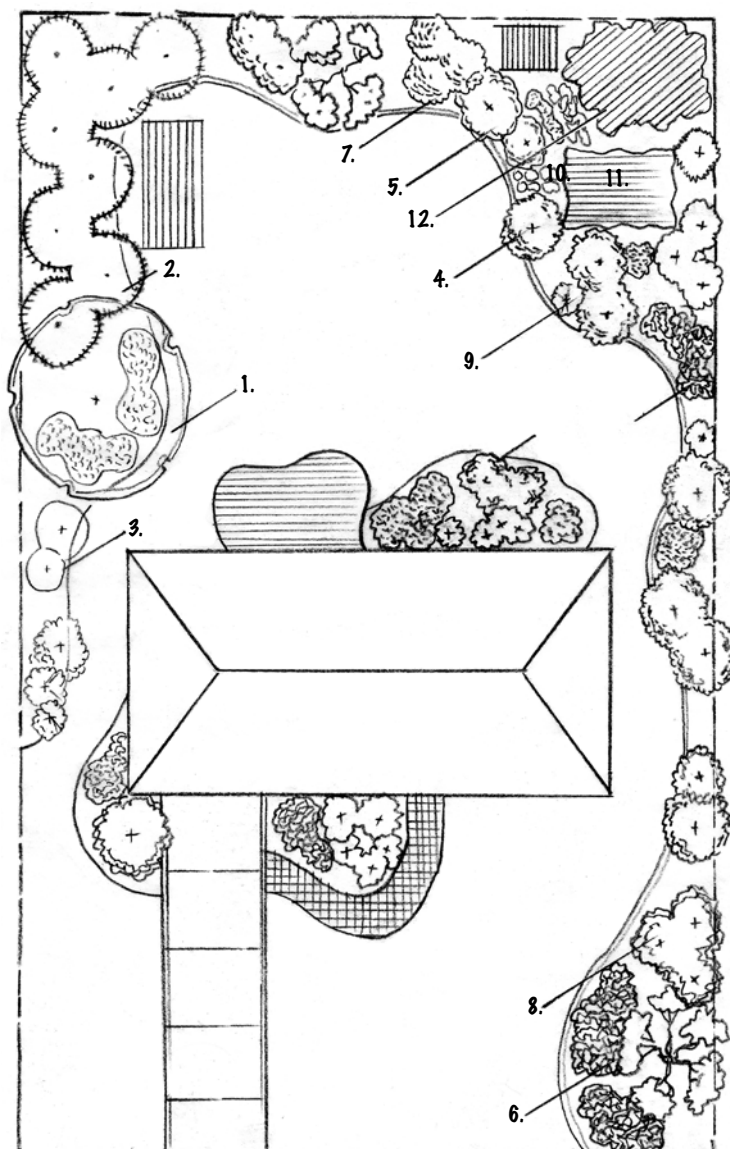
Step 9. Select your plants

This is the fun part and an important step. Taking a little time to choose the right plants will save you money and ensure a healthy, vibrant yard in the long run. Keep in mind the “right plant in the right place” rule. Select plants based on:

- hardiness
- sunlight requirements
- moisture requirements
- soil and drainage requirements
- beauty
- shape
- texture
- seasonal – aim for a garden that has year-round appeal
- flowers
- fruit/edibles
- bark
- mature size (width and height) – remember they are going to grow.

Refer to YardSmart perennials and YardSmart Trees and Shrubs brochures or visit calgary.ca/yardsmart for information on a great selection of plants well-suited to our growing conditions.

Sketching out your plan doesn't have to be perfect, but using a scale, such as having each grid square equal two feet, will help. The first two things to draw on the map are where north is and where your property lines are.



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|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Shade tree | 7. Large flowering shrub |
| 2. Evergreen tree | 8. Medium flowering shrub |
| 3. Evergreen shrub | 9. Small flowering shrub |
| 4. Large deciduous shrub | 10. Annual bed |
| 5. Medium deciduous shrub | 11. Perennial bed |
| 6. Flowering tree | 12. Prairie grasses |

Refined sketch.



A few design pointers:

- A large grouping of plants will have more impact than just one plant.
- Keeping tree size at maturation in mind, choose trees that strategically provide shade where needed.
- Create layers by planting trees or taller shrubs (if space permits) in the back of the garden, then medium shrubs and plants, then smaller plants and then groundcovers up front.
- Have a focal point in each main area of the garden – it could be a bush you love, clematis on a trellis, or a bird bath. Also repeat some plant species from one area of the yard to another.
- Keep a sense of scale. If you have a small lot and house, don't choose very large plants that will overwhelm the space.
- Think beyond flowers when it comes to interest. Consider the colour, form and texture that grasses, shrubs and groundcovers provide.

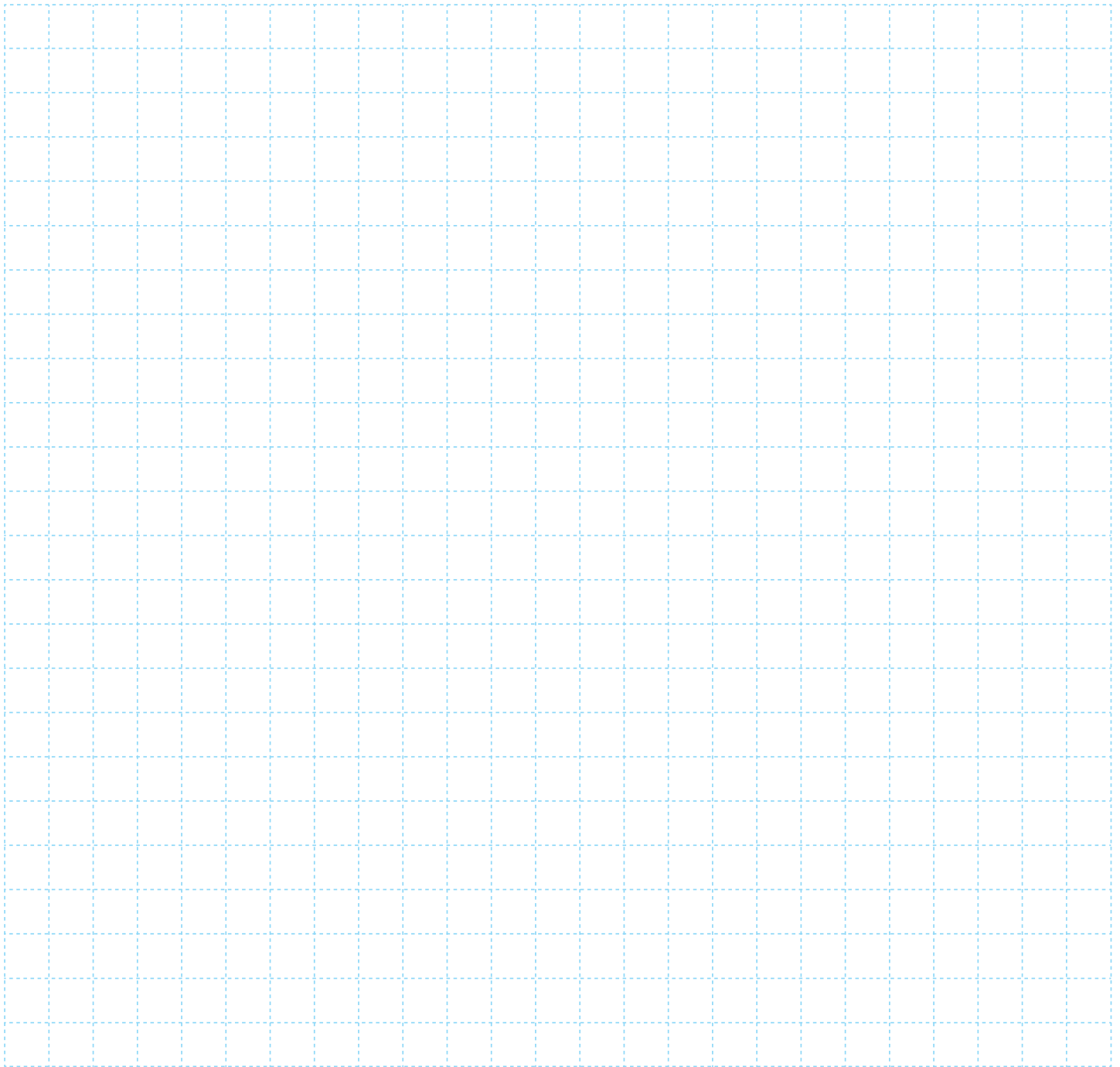
- You should include some feature plants that look good all year such as evergreen shrubs or junipers.
- Generally, an odd number such as three, five or seven is visually more appealing than an even number.
- You can design beds, walkways or patios straight or curved. Whichever you choose, use consistently throughout.

Step 10. Add plant names

Now you add the names of your chosen plants to the design using a legend. To make shopping easier, you should note the botanical and common plant names. For example, the botanical name for Purple Coneflower is *Echinacea purpurea*.

Visit calgary.ca/yardsmart for tips on mulch, soil and plants.





Site analysis checklist: Use this grid to lay out your garden. Scale: one square = _____

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|--|---|--|--|
| ☐ Scale selected | ☐ Sun | ☐ Patios, decks | ☐ Utility lines |
| ☐ North arrow | ☐ Shade | ☐ Existing trees | • Water/sewer lines |
| ☐ House | ☐ Good views | ☐ Existing shrubs | • Power line |
| ☐ Doors, windows | ☐ Bad views | ☐ Banks, slopes | • Phone/cable line |
| ☐ Other buildings | ☐ Roads, driveways | ☐ Drainage issues | |
| ☐ Wind | ☐ Sidewalks | ☐ Downspouts | |

Before you begin your project make sure you contact
Alberta One Call (1-800-242-3447 or www.albertaonecall.com) to locate your utilities.