



# 8 Ways to Lower Your Energy Bills With Landscaping

By Jane Purnell | Updated: June 16, 2022

Landscaping



Your new landscape design checks all the boxes: Striking colors, compelling textures, and native plants. But does it save you money? Check out how these eight landscaping ideas can lower your energy bills, green up your wallet, and encourage a more eco-friendly home.

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## 8 landscaping tips that can lower your energy bills

### 1. Reduce heat in summer with deciduous trees

When the summer sun beats down on your home, blasting the air conditioner and plugging in the fan are the only ways to cool down. Your electric bill skyrockets, but at least you can finally get comfortable.

If this gruesome summer day sounds familiar to you, then your home could use some shade. By planting deciduous trees in an arc around the [east, southeast, south](#),

southwest, and west sides of your home, you can help block the blazing sunlight from directly hitting your house.

With less heat building up in your home, the less you'll depend on the air conditioner, and the lower your energy costs will be.

### **Why plant deciduous trees?**

You want your trees to block the summer sun, but come wintertime, you'll appreciate the warm sunlight. As the temperatures begin to drop in autumn, the leaves will fall from deciduous trees and allow the sunlight easy access to the home.

On the other hand, had you relied on evergreen trees for summer shade, your home would still be shaded in winter and blocked from the warm sun.

**Pro Tip:** Avoid deciduous trees that have a cone-shaped crown, such as pin oak. Why? Because they don't provide as much shade as a round, wide-spreading canopy.

### **How much money can shade trees save you?**

- According to the U.S. Department of Energy, carefully positioned trees can save up to 25 percent of a typical household's energy use.
- Proper use of trees, shrubs, vines, and structures may reduce summer cooling costs by 50 percent or more.

### **What else can trees do for you?**

- Trees can reduce the surrounding air temperatures as much as 6 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Trees absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen back into the air.
- Shaded surfaces, such as a patio or blacktop, can be 20 degrees to 45 degrees Fahrenheit cooler than the hottest, unshaded area.
- Trees provide food and shelter for wildlife.
- Trees can increase property value.

### **Landscape with fire safety in mind**

The threat of wildfire is accelerating due to climate change, and many areas on Earth are vulnerable to this natural disaster. When planting trees in your yard, follow the guidelines

of **fire-resistant landscaping**. Rules include, **but are not limited to:**

- Don't plant trees any closer than 30 feet from your home.
- Distance trees so that the edges of their mature canopies are at least 10 horizontal feet apart.
- Trim branches that hang above your roof.

## 2. Block winter winds with evergreens

When deciduous trees lose their leaves in fall, prepare for the blistering winds! Cranking up the heat will warm your cold toes, but it will take a bite out of your energy bill.

Planting evergreens around all sides of your home might seem like a great way to block wind, **but you don't want to go overboard**. Why? Because you want to enjoy the winter sun's warming effects, too.

To achieve the perfect balance of solar heat and minimal wind, plant an arc of evergreens on the **north** and **west** sides of your home (the coldest winds blow from the north and northwest). Evergreens will protect your home from wind chill while the east and south sides of your home remain toasty in the sun.

### How much money can wind blockers save you?

- Windbreaks can save up to **25 percent** on your heating costs.

## 3. Insulate with vines

If trees are not a suitable option for your landscape, consider growing vines up walls or trellises. Vines insulate the covered wall and protect the home against the summer heat and cold winter winds.

Growing vines on an overhead structure, such as an arbor or slatted roof, is another way to provide shade.

**Pro Tip:** Some vines, such as English Ivy, can grow directly on masonry. If you have a wooden wall, it's best to grow the vine on a trellis. Otherwise, the vine may encourage the wood to rot and decompose.

## How much money can vines save you?

- If placed in the right areas, vines can help cut your summer cooling cost by 50 percent or more.

## 4. Shade the AC unit by planting shrubs and bushes

**Fun fact:** The hotter your outdoor air conditioning unit, the harder it has to work. Why? Because when the summer heat radiates off the unit, the unit uses more energy to cool itself down.

By shading your outdoor air conditioning unit with shrubs and bushes, you can reduce indoor temperatures by up to [3 degrees](#) Fahrenheit, increase its efficiency by [10 percent](#), and lower your air conditioning costs.

## 5. Save water with mulch

If you rely on a municipal water supply, then the amount of water you use may not impact your electricity bill (but it will affect your water bill).

On the other hand, if your water comes from a well, the energy needed to run the pump will affect your electricity bill. The more water you use from the well, the more electricity you'll need to run the pump, and the higher your electric bill will be.

A simple way to reduce the amount of water you use in the landscape is to apply [mulch](#) in your garden and flower beds. Mulch helps retain moisture in the soil, which means the irrigation water won't evaporate as quickly. The more you mulch, the less you water.

Minimizing evaporation isn't mulch's only benefit. Mulch also:

- Boosts curb appeal
- Stabilizes soil temperatures
- Prevents erosion
- Adds nutrients to the soil (if organic)

## 6. Save water with drip irrigation

Another easy way to lower your landscape's water needs and save energy is to rely on a drip irrigation system for your gardens, shrubs, and trees.

Drip irrigation is a network of plastic pipes that slowly and accurately delivers water to the plant's root zone. Sprinklers and garden hoses often result in wasted water due to evaporation, scattered spray, leaching, and erosion. Drip irrigation maintains the ideal soil moisture levels without wasting precious water (and tiring out your pump).

## 7. Save water with a **xeriscape**

A **xeriscape** is a type of landscape that requires little to no watering. A well-designed xeriscape can usually thrive off the region's rainfall levels without the help of your garden hose.

So what makes a xeriscape such a water saver? Instead of high-maintenance plants or patches of thirsty turfgrass, a xeriscape contains:

- Hardscapes (such as a paver walkway or patio)
- Drought-tolerant [native plants](#)
- Sand
- Soil
- Rocks
- Mulch

## 8. Say yes to solar-powered landscape lighting

Need a bit of light around your home at night? Consider installing solar-powered landscape lights.

A solar-powered light captures the energy from the sun's rays and turns it into electricity. When you choose solar-powered outdoor lighting, you won't have to hook the lights up to a power source, and you'll save on your electricity bill each month.

Despite the long-term savings and eco-friendly benefits, solar-powered landscape lights have a few disadvantages you may want to consider:

- **Maintenance:** You'll need to clear the solar panel of debris; otherwise, it can't capture the sun's rays.
- **Inconsistent lighting:** If the weather has been cloudy, the lights may not shine as bright.
- **Only work in sunny areas:** Solar-powered lights won't work in areas without good sunlight, such as a covered patio.

## Save more with the help of a pro

If you want your landscape to reach its full money-saving, eco-friendly potential, turn to a skilled professional for help. A licensed arborist can carefully place your trees, a landscape architect can create the sustainable design of your dreams, and a [lawn care professional](#) can maintain your new, energy-saving yard.

Not only can a qualified professional help you achieve a cost-effective landscape, but they also help you save time and energy. Hiring a pro also allows you to avoid expensive mistakes -- it's never a good idea to take on a costly DIY project that's beyond your skill level.

So what are you waiting for? Start saving money, energy, and water with these eight energy-efficient landscaping ideas.

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### **Jane Purnell**

Jane Purnell is an artist, writer, and nature lover. She enjoys teaching readers about the importance of eco-friendly lawn care, integrated pest management, biodiversity, and sustainable landscaping.

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