



Landscape Design

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Three Quick Landscape Tips

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Often it's the little things that can make a big difference. Here are three quick tips I've learned that have made a big difference in my own garden, and I hope will in yours too!

Buy a water meter. Are you watering too much or too little? End the guesswork: A water meter will give you your answer. Wondering what brown tips on potted plants signify can be like reading tealeaves. A 3"-deep test with a meter and you know if you need to take that plant for an immediate deep soak in the sink or keep the watering can away until it dries out.

Use a water meter for landscape plants as well. Many plants, and especially drought-tolerant plants, like deep soakings to establish deep roots, with a dry out in between. For many people used to shallow rooted water-thirsty lawns, that's new behavior, but it's easy to master. Just probe 3" deep with the water meter. If it's on the wet side, give it a couple more days before you water. If it's dry, turn on the sprinkler and soak the soil around the plant's roots to at least 3". Of course, when in doubt research what type of soil condition your individual plant prefers (dry or moist). Basic water meters are available at your local hardware store for under \$10.

Watch your planting and mulch depths. The rule of thumb for planting most new plants is to dig a hole twice as wide as the root ball and JUST as deep as the crown, not deeper. It's common to plant too deeply, which when coupled with a 2-3" layer of mulch too close to the stem, smothers a plant and creates the perfect environment for rot and disease. Make sure the final dirt level of your hole matches the level the plant was in in its pot or even a little higher. Then keep your mulch at least 2" away to keep the air flowing.

Fertilize your outdoor pots. I'm a bit guilty of "plant and forget" with my pots. After having more than a couple dry out while I was on vacation, I made sure to extend the drip system to them for regular watering. But after a couple of years you also need to remember their dirt will need some nutrients. You can either repot with fresh soil and/or to a bigger pot (not a bad idea if your plant is root bound) or start adding fertilizer on a monthly basis like you do for indoor potted plants (right?). You'll be instantly rewarded!