



Confessions of a Miserly Gardener

By Sandra Gray, Fort Bend Master Gardener

I am a practicing tightwad. I love Mother Earth (she knows I do) but I love my money more. So, when I learned all the ways Earth-Kind® gardening could save me money, I was onboard. Here are some ways I save money using these techniques and you might too. You don't need to do all of these things but every little bit saves you money (and helps Mother Earth).

Water wisely. Don't pay for more water than necessary. Instead, consider using drought-resistant plants, drip irrigation, xeriscapes, and rain water harvesting. Check your irrigation system regularly to avoid watering the street and sidewalks. Avoid overwatering, a common gardening mistake, because it will save money and overwatering promotes some plant diseases.

Use native plants and plant them in the right place. Native plants are well adapted to your environment so they are more likely to thrive. The likelihood of success increases if you put the plant in a place suitable to its needs. More importantly, if the plant lives, you won't need to pay money to replace it!

Mow correctly for your grass type. Mow at the correct height with a mulching mower and mow frequently enough to remove no more than one-third of the plant. This will keep the grass healthier and recycling the grass cuttings into the soil reduces the need for fertilization. For extra credit, use a non-gas-powered mower. Hint: a reel mower may save you gym fees.

Reduce the amount of turf in your landscape. Doing this can reduce watering, mowing, and fertilization costs. Instead, replace the grass with groundcovers, wildflowers, ornamental grasses, and other plants that require less time and money (!!!).

Follow written directions for chemical usage and storage. If you must use chemicals like pesticides or herbicides, carefully follow the package directions. Using too little may be a waste of time, using too much may cause more harm than good (and wastes money). Try to purchase only the amount needed and store supplies carefully so the chemical will not go bad before it is used (again wasting money).

Take care of your garden tools. Caring for your tools is always cheaper than replacing them. However, you will want to buy good quality tools initially to ensure they will have a long life under your tender care.



Plant a tree. Not only will a tree enhance the market value of your home (ka-ching!), it can also reduce your heating and cooling costs if planted in the right place.

Compost. Composting can be as simple as recycling coffee grounds and banana peels into your garden or a bit more elaborate. Yes, there may be some initial set-up costs but there will also be savings in the compost you won't need to purchase to enhance your soil.

Save seeds and share plants. When your annual plants go to seed, save those seeds for next season to avoid the costs of seed packets or plants. You can also participate in a plant exchange with friends and neighbors. Bartering can include landscape tips about planting and caring for the plants. I love free!

Use solar-powered landscape lighting. Landscape lighting enhances the appeal and security of your landscape. However, I don't want to pay those electrical costs if there is a free alternative. Do you? Solar-powered lights have become less expensive and easier to install and are worth consideration.



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Environmentally friendly gardening need not cost you money. In fact, it can be a soul satisfier to misers like me. Learn more about Earth-Kind gardening at <http://earth-kind.tamu.edu>.