Choose the right plant for the right spot

One key to having a landscape that thrives without intensive inputs, such as fertilizers, pesticides and frequent watering, is to choose plants that are best suited to your yard conditions.

Many factors affect plant growth and maintenance including:
- Amount of sun or shade
- Soil conditions including texture, acidity, fertility, drainage, and moisture holding capacity
- Exposure to wind, salt, and traffic
- Land features such as steep slopes, irregular depressions, wet or dry spots, and stones, boulders, and ledge

Plants prefer or tolerate a certain set of conditions over others. When plants are forced to grow in areas that are not as suitable, they become stressed, fail to thrive and become more susceptible to disease and pests. Lawn grass, for example, can require a lot of inputs and maintenance compared to other plants such as certain groundcovers, shrubs and trees.

- If your lawn has trouble spots or areas that are hard to mow, think about replacing them with other plants that are naturally disease and pest resistant and that are well-suited to those conditions that are problematic for a lawn. Always beware of introducing an invasive species and consider native plants.
- Think of your yard as a unique environment with the opportunity to be creative. Where there are wet spots, a water garden may be an alternative. Where there are natural woodlands on your property, consider leaving them intact and incorporating wildflower gardens, shade gardens, and creative edge landscaping between your yard and the woodlands. Where there are steep slopes and/or surface stones or ledge, groundcovers, low-growing shrubs and rock gardens may be a nice solution.

Sweet Fern, Russian Arborvitae, Anthony Waterer, and Bayberry were planted on this steep, north-facing, shaded coastal bank. These plants replace difficult to maintain lawn. Wickford Cove, North Kingstown, RI. September 2003.
Another important factor that adds to the success of your landscape is proper planting and establishment of the plants. Proper site preparation, handling and planting methods, fertilizing and watering are important in getting the plants off to a good start. With careful planning and selection, well-established plants will eventually require minimal maintenance, fertilizers, pesticides and watering. Think about renovating or planting new areas in phases, to avoid having large areas that are in need of special attention.

For more information:

URI Sustainable Trees and Shrubs Manual

URI Master Gardener Hotline:
1 (800) 448-1011 (M-Th, 9AM to 2 PM)
Call to get your gardening questions answered

URI Plant Protection Clinic:
www.uri.edu/ce/ceec/plantclinic.html
(401) 874-2900
Assistance with identification of plant insects and disease

The Rhode Island Wild Plant Society:
www.riwps.org
(401) 783-5895
Information on native plants, native plant suppliers, and a list of invasive species to avoid

URI Home*A*Syst Program
web.uri.edu/safewater
(401) 874-5398
Information on protecting your drinking water

Mountain Laurel, Winterberry, Inkberry, Sedum, and Redvein Enkianthus are just a few of the native and sustainable plants established in this contoured shade bed.
Wickford Cove, North Kingstown, RI.
September 2003.