

#3 Landscaping Slopes

The increase of residents to northern Nevada has led to the development of housing communities off the valley floor. These home owners are often presented with the challenge of landscaping a yard with one or more slopes. It can be difficult for some to incorporate a sloped section of yard into their landscape as these areas can become the cause of many concerns if not dealt with correctly.

The slope, if unprotected, can become the main cause of erosion in your yard. If left unattended it will get worse, degrading the slope, creating rills, and leaving deposits of soil at the base, all of which can potentially create a drainage problem in your yard.

There are several ways to avoid erosion problems and create a stable beautiful slope; they're not mutually exclusive. Before approaching this type of landscape project it is necessary to determine the drainage patterns that exist. Look around your home to determine what type of drainage is in place. Some yards have drain grates in place that direct water underground to another location. Other yards may have drainage swales that direct water over the land surface to a low point where it will then drain towards the road.

You will not want to disturb the drainage patterns created in your yard. If the drainage is a problem or needs to be changed to incorporate a planting plan you should consider the advice of a professional as you may disrupt the drainage causing further problems in the yard.

Once you have determined how the water is draining off your slope, you can begin creating a design. An easy and attractive way to decorate the shape and hide the swales is to create flowing river beds within the drainage. These drainage areas are usually straight cutouts in the landscape that are a few inches lower than the surrounding grade. These areas can be filled in with rock that compliments the surroundings. For a more dramatic look the drainage can be gently widened, on either side of the low point, creating a more natural s shaped creek bed.

Now that the drainage has been addressed the slope garden can begin to take form. A gently sloping hillside can be planted with a variety of plants and accented with native rocks and boulders which can spill in to the flat of your yard. Choosing woody, low growing shrubs that have fibrous root systems will help to stabilize the slopes soil. As the plants mature the roots will hold the soil in place eliminating the concern for future erosion problems.

Another consideration when landscaping a slope is the possible use of walls and terracing. There are a few options that can be contemplated when choosing the type of retaining wall you will build to contain and enhance your slope. You'll

want to consider the length and height of the wall that will be built. Choosing the material that will be used to build them can become a visual obstruction if not blended into the surrounding environment. Consider using natural materials. These will blend better into the surrounding landscape and can create nooks and cracks within the wall for placing small, interesting plants.

If you choose to terrace your slope, take some time to consider placement options which can create interesting effects on the slope. The various levels of wall can be painted, staggered, and different materials can be used to create visual interest. The levels created on each terrace can be simply planted or you can incorporate dramatic vegetation to make your wall stand apart from the conventional retaining wall. There are many cascading and climbing plants that look extraordinary when placed on a terraced wall; as this vertical placement allows the plants to become highly visible in the landscape.

There are a variety of ways that the 'slope' can be incorporated into the surrounding landscape. In some cases this can simply be done by covering the slope and stabilizing it with rock mulch. For gardening spaces others may use terraces to create pockets of planting beds and add splashes of color and texture from wall materials. For a more dramatic impact, consider building in water features, pathways and adding steps which invite visitors to explore the various levels of the slope. Whatever choice you make each must incorporate the slope into the surrounding landscape, protecting them from erosion and producing a beautifully planted landscape.