

15.2 PHC Best Practices

In consultation with the designer and client:

1. Manage all landscapes to be healthy and functioning ecosystems that maximize plant health and diversity. (*ecoPRO Certified Sustainable Landscape Professional: Guiding Principles and Sustainable Best Practices*, version 2b, 2014)
2. Report any plant health issues observed on each site visit to the client.
3. Be able to recognize native plant species in the designed landscape and tell them apart from unwanted plants.
4. Thin or transplant overplanted material at the appropriate time of year.
5. Locate thinned or overplanted material so as to provide room for grown and air circulation.
6. Divide suitable herbaceous perennials every third year or so. Consult with designer and client on location and spacing of divisions.
7. Know how to divide the different species of plants on the planting plan.
8. Determine the cause of dead or diseased plants and if necessary, replace them with more appropriate selections.
9. Minimize disturbance of naturally occurring beneficial organisms, such as biological predators.
10. Allow most herbaceous perennials, *including grasses*, to overwinter, providing shelter and wildlife habitat. Only cut back in early spring. Compost or recycle cuttings, keeping material out of waste stream.
11. As appropriate for the site and location within the site, allow dead wood to remain, creating wildlife habitat (called "snags").
12. Time all interventions optimally according to the plant's cycle of growth, flowering, and seed production.



Grasses provide winter landscape interest for humans and shelter and habitat for birds. This grass planting will be cut down in early spring before new growth appears.

PHOTO: CHERYL CORSON

15.3 Mulch Best Practices

1. Rely on mulch as little as possible in favor of greater plant density and ground covers.
2. Always obtain landscape mulch from reliable sources who can verify it is free of harmful chemicals, inorganic debris, or known pathogens such as emerald ash borer.
3. Do not use inorganic mulch materials such as rubber, or materials that will not break down into the soil like brick fragments.
4. Do not use synthetic weed barriers such as plastic or landscape cloth.
5. Do not use dyed mulch, which is made of construction wood waste such as pallets. Possibly toxic waste contaminants and the dye leach into the soil harming or killing beneficial soil bacteria, and immobilizing nitrogen in the soil, making it unavailable to plants.
6. Never place mulch in direct contact with trunks or stems of woody plants.
7. Mulch should not exceed a depth of two to three inches, though shallow-rooted plants should receive no more than an inch.

8. Mulch should be placed around woody plants so as to collect, not shed water.
9. Rake, aerate, and reposition old mulch on site rather than removing and sending it into the waste stream.
10. Apply no mulch to established beds where plant foliage or groundcover completely covers the soil surface.



Properly mulched trees have a much higher survival rate. Always keep mulch several inches away from trunks of woody plants.

PHOTO: MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND, DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION (DEP). RAINSCAPES PROGRAM



This perennial bed relies on evergreen groundcovers more than on mulch to retain soil moisture and discourage weeds.

PHOTO: CHERYL CORSON

15.4 Pruning Best Practices

CCLC's *Conservation Landscaping Guidelines* say, "Maintenance such as pruning requires knowledge of specific plant species and their habits and requirements... If you are used to regularly scheduled cutting, shearing ...and so on, you will find this approach very different." (p. 37) Once the ornamental woody plant palette in designed landscapes further evolves to include predominantly native shrubs, the need for most pruning will disappear.

Work with designers and clients to strategically replace rows of burning bush (*Euonymus alatus*), Autumn olive (*Eleagnus umbellata*), barberry (*Berberis vulgaris*), and the like with looser, more naturalistic arrangements of native shrubs whose genetically programmed mature size is in proportion to its design setting. Tons of hedge clippings will then never reach the waste stream, and labor savings can be redirected to maintaining more highly functioning green infrastructure BMPs. Here are six sustainable pruning best practices for shrubs:

1. Only prune plants as needed for health and vigor, but never more often than every two or three years.
2. Establish a pruning schedule in writing based on the specific plant species on your site. Discuss it with designer and client.
3. Never shear shrubs into neat geometric shapes.
4. Prune flowering shrubs only after they flower but before they set buds.
5. When you do prune, chip clippings for use in compost on site whenever possible or if removed, recycle clippings.
6. Communicate with clients about pruning operations and keep records of what you prune and when.