

June 1, 2016

Illinois Landscape Contractors  
Association (ILCA) Sustainable  
Landscape Maintenance Annual Calendar



# SUSTAINABLE MAINTENANCE CALENDAR



# INTRODUCTION

---

## SUSTAINABLE MAINTENANCE GUIDE AND CALENDAR

This guide is intended to equip Illinois Landscape Contractors Association (ILCA) members with all the tools necessary to implement a sustainable maintenance program. It takes into account the constraints of a landscape company in regards to costs, time, equipment, personnel, and horticultural knowledge. The guide is written so any landscape company can apply these maintenance principles to almost any commercial or residential landscape and improve the positive impact on the environment without sacrificing aesthetic quality.

The premise of this guide is for when a contractor interacts with a client or inherits a property and the property owner/manager is unwilling to change any significant portions of the landscape. They do not want to plant or remove large sections of plant material, turf, or hardscaping. The irrigation system will remain as well as existing water features.

The following seasonal schedule demonstrates how a maintenance contractor can implement sustainable landscaping practices into the landscape. Over time the landscape will become more sustainable and affordable to maintain even with the same landscape design.

The guide is organized as a monthly handbook that doubles as a checklist. Each month, crews are equipped with specific instructions on what actions will be completed that month in order to maintain a healthy, regenerative, and successful sustainable landscape.

This is a guide written by contractors for contractors. The guide addresses horticultural principles and best management practices instead of concentrating on features and renovations.

**EVERY SUSTAINABLE JOURNEY  
BEGINS WITH THE FIRST STEP.**

# FOREWORD

---

It's January and you are alone in your office trying to get ready for the upcoming season. Most of the office staff has not yet returned from the winter break and you appreciate the quiet. As you take a sip of your coffee and look at the snow forecast, the phone rings.

**“Hello, My Landscaping Company,” you answer.**

**“Hi, it's Mary Miller from Mockingbird Lane; happy holidays.”**

**The Millers have been maintenance clients for seven years. They have two kids, ages 8 and 13 and a dog. They are great clients but with a modest budget. They leave water for the crews and tip them at the end of the year.**

**“I was hoping you could help me out with our New Years' resolution this year”, Mary says. “ We all committed, as a family, to be more ‘green’. We aren't doing anything major but just examining all the little areas in our life where we can make a difference. Is there anything you can do to help us make our resolution come true?”**

**“Well, um,” you respond fumbling for the most recent issue of *The Landscape Contractor* magazine that you remember had an article on organic fertilizer. “We could think about installing a couple of rain barrels for recaptured water, put in a bio-swale, or maybe rip out that driveway and replace it with some permeable pavers,” you continue.**

**She pauses. “Thanks, but you know our budget. All of those sound great, but we can't pay much more than we are currently paying for the maintenance. We love the work you do, but is there anything you can do to go a little greener without changing our current level of service?” she asks.**

This is the moment when you become either a spectator or participant in the sustainable landscaping movement. A customer has asked if you have the ability to change your maintenance practices to become more environmentally-friendly. If you say “no” you may lose the client. If you say “yes,” you must deliver. What's it going to be? Yes or no? This is the moment when sustainability happens.



## TURF

- Research and build the season's fertilization and soil building program.
  - o Focus on a program that utilizes:
    - Soil biology and building healthy soils;
    - natural sources of nitrogen and other macro nutrients;
    - use slow release when using synthetic sources;
    - consider micro nutrients and other inputs such as iron, manganese, calcium, humus, liquid biologicals, compost, and compost teas.
- Commit to following an integrated pest management (IPM) approach for the season. Develop a written plan on how to handle common pests: weeds, insects and fungus.
  - o Examples include: dandelions, grubs, clover, crab grass, creeping charlie etc...
- Study your priority pests. Understand these pest's reproductive life cycles and indicators. This will help eliminate or drastically reduce chemical use. Evaluate new environmental friendly control options.

## PERENNIALS

- Research native perennials for the upcoming season. Develop a list of "go to" perennials for environmental conditions such as wet, dry, sunny-shady, etc.... that you will encounter during the year. Consider the importance of aesthetics when designing with native plants.



## TREES AND SHRUBS

- Prune disease susceptible species (ex. American Elm) that can only be pruned in the dormant season. See website resource list for additional information links (pg 37).
- Dormant prune all appropriate trees and shrubs. This improves the health and appearance of the plants and reduces maintenance costs. See website resources:

<http://www.extension.umn.edu/garden/landscaping/maint/pruning.html>

<http://www.extension.umn.edu/garden/yard-garden/trees-shrubs/pruning-trees-shrubs/>

- Inspect for and remove all invasive plant species. This removes competition for native plant species and helps protect the local eco-systems. See website resources:

Midwest Invasive Plant Network: <http://www.mipn.org/>

Chicago Botanic Gardens:

[http://www.chicagobotanic.org/research/identifying\\_threats/invasive](http://www.chicagobotanic.org/research/identifying_threats/invasive)

City of Chicago:

[http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/bacp/supp\\_info/invasive\\_species.html](http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/bacp/supp_info/invasive_species.html)

## IRRIGATION

- Research new technology for water savings and water efficiency.
- Determine if any of your current sites could utilize this technology.
- Research and publish water costs for each municipality where you have clients.



## SNOW

- Repair any broken snow equipment so that proper function and safety are ensured.

## GENERAL

- Prepare a Sustainable Action Plan (SAP) using the template provided by the ILCA (<https://www.ilca.net/sustainable-landscaping/>). Communicate the goals of the SAP to clients using email and social media.
- Perform proper machine maintenance. This will increase efficiency and reduce emissions.

## JANUARY SUSTAINABILITY TIPS

- 👉 Monitor winter precipitation accumulation amounts. This helps determine spring moisture needs for the plants.
- 👉 The reality of climate change and its effects on local weather patterns has necessitated lawn care operators to reevaluate both timing and scope of many pest control programs. Time your applications based on weather (soil temperature and degree days for example) and not calendar dates.