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## Be your own landscaper

**These dirt-cheap landscaping tricks will spruce up your yard now - and keep it looking good next year too.**

By Josh Garskof, Money Magazine contributing writer  
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(Money Magazine) -- Summertime, and the living is supposed to be easy. The fish are jumping -- or maybe it's the kids at the pool -- and yard work is the last thing on your mind. But the lawn has brown spots, monochrome greenery has replaced those May flowers, and weeds have overrun the mulch beds.



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Luckily, you can solve these problems without paying big bucks to a landscaper -- or losing a weekend to a do-it-yourself job. The following simple tricks will beautify your yard now and boost your home's curb appeal -- and value -- for years to come.

### Banish the brown

We all know we should water regularly through dry spells, but there's another secret to greening up the lawn. Mow it to a height of at least three inches. This enables the grass to retain more moisture by keeping the soil shaded and cooler, which allows the roots to grow deeper, so they can find their own water.

In fall, feed the lawn with a fall fertilizer blend (about \$40 for a half-acre lot), which will improve the turf's water-seeking abilities next year. Also, thanks to trees getting larger (or being pruned), your sun exposure may have changed. Sprinkle a sun-and-shade seed mix (\$5) over problem areas.

### Whack your weeds

If your mulch beds have turned into weed beds, spray the unwanted plants with Roundup (about \$20), which will kill weeds in about 10 days, says Chris Valenti, a Lewes, Del., landscaper and vice president of the National Landscaping Association.

Next spring, head off the problem by using a product that prevents weeds from germinating at all, such as Preen (around \$25). Or try a nonchemical solution: Lay red rosin paper (sold in the paint aisle at home centers; \$15 for a three-by-140-foot roll) over the planting beds before mulching.

### Bring in some blooms

For a quick fix, plant annuals such as impatiens, verbena, or zinnias, which cost less than \$1 each and require digging only tiny holes - or can be potted. To get color that returns year after year, you'll need perennials and shrubs that bloom during the summer (\$5 to \$30), such as crape myrtle, irises, and hydrangeas.

Not sure what blooms late in your climate? Just shop when you want the flowers. "Nurseries tend to stock plants when they're flowering, because that's when they're most appealing," says Valenti.

### Perk up parched shrubs

The best way to rescue wilting, curling, or shrinking foliage is to place a hose over the roots and trickle water onto them for about 45 minutes, says Tulsa landscape architect Clare Ashby. You can automate that process with a soaker hose, a slow-watering device that dribbles out water along its entire span (\$15 to \$60, depending on length).

In spring, lay the hose along the plant beds before you mulch, then attach it to your outdoor spigot with an automatic timer (\$20 to \$40, depending on whether it's mechanical or digital). You won't have to do a thing next summer - and the living really will be easy. ■

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