Your Yard, Your Way

A Northeast Homeowner's Guide to Landscape Design



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TURF BUNNY
LAWN AND LANDSCAPE

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Introduction

A great landscape starts with the right questions, not the right plants. This short guide from Turf Bunny, your neighborhood landscape design expert, shares the questions our designers ask on every property, plus a few pro tips most homeowners never hear.

Based in Clifton Park, Turf Bunny proudly serves homeowners across the Capital Region.



This is the goal. A yard that feels like part of your home, where morning coffee turns into an hour outside.

You won't find a plan for your yard here. Every property is different, with its own soil, sun, slope, and story. Instead, you'll find ideas to think about, mistakes to avoid, and a clearer picture of what's possible.

This guide is written for Northeast homeowners, where cold winters, road salt, and heavy clay soils shape what thrives.

How to use this guide: read a chapter, walk your yard, and jot down what you notice. Those notes are the start of a great design conversation.

Chapter 1: What Is the Best Landscape Design for My Home?

The best design answers one of two questions: how do you want to feel outside, or what does your house want to look like? Most great landscapes start with one and borrow from the other.

Path 1: Design for the experience you want

Start with how you'll use the space, then let the plants follow.

- **Privacy:** layered evergreens and tall shrubs that screen views year round.
- **Entertaining:** a patio sized for your guests, with plantings that frame it rather than crowd it.
- **Calm:** soft textures, fewer colors, and the sound of grasses moving in the wind.
- **Wildlife:** native flowers, berries, and shelter that bring birds and butterflies close.
- **Play:** open lawn where kids and pets need it, and tough plants at the edges.

Design for all five senses. An experiential landscape invites you to do more than look:

- **See:** color through every season, from spring blooms to red winter stems.
- **Hear:** grasses rustling, birdsong, or a small water feature.
- **Smell:** lilac by the porch, herbs along the path, fragrant viburnum by the door.
- **Touch:** soft lamb's ear, smooth stone, cool moss underfoot.
- **Taste:** blueberries, serviceberries, and fresh herbs within reach of the kitchen.



A garden is more than a view. Watch a hummingbird visit bee balm, listen to tall grasses rustle, brush the soft leaves of lamb's ear, breathe in the scent of catmint, and taste a handful of ripe berries.

Path 2: Design to fit your home's style

Your house already has a personality. The landscape should finish the sentence.

Home style	Landscape that fits
Colonial	Symmetry, clipped hedges, a centered walkway
Craftsman	Natural stone, layered shrubs, relaxed curves
Modern	Clean lines, bold masses of one plant, ornamental grasses

Home style	Landscape that fits
Farmhouse or cottage	Loose perennials, picket edges, a mix of flowers and edibles

Layering Color Through the Seasons

A well-layered bed hands the spotlight from one plant to the next, so something is always performing. Here's a simple four-plant combination, arranged from front to back:

Season	Plant	Height	What it brings
Spring	Creeping phlox	4–6"	A carpet of pink, purple, or white blooms in April and May
Summer	Catmint 'Walker's Low'	2–3'	Airy lavender-blue flowers from June into September; a favorite of bees
Fall	Little bluestem	2–3'	See-through, blue-green grass that turns copper and holds its form into winter
Winter	Redosier dogwood 'Arctic Fire'	3–5'	Bright red stems that glow against snow



One planting bed, four seasons. Layer spring bulbs, summer flowers, fall foliage, and plants that hold their shape through winter to keep the front yard interesting year-round.

The airy catmint and little bluestem let you see through to the dogwood behind them, so the bed feels layered rather than walled off.

Note: this combination assumes full sun and healthy, well-drained soil. It doesn't account for shade, road salt, wet areas, or other site challenges, which can change the right plant choices.

For the Flower Lover: Blooms from Spring to Frost

Plant these four together, and something will be in bloom from April until the first hard frost.

Bloom time	Flower	Height	Why we love it
April to May	Daffodil	12–18"	The first color of spring; deer and rodents leave it alone
May to June	Peony	2–3'	Big, fragrant blooms that can thrive for decades
July to September	Purple coneflower	2–4'	Long summer blooms that feed bees, then seeds for finches
August to October	Sedum 'Autumn Joy'	18–24"	Flower heads turn from pink to rusty red and stand through winter

The same conditions apply: full sun and healthy, well-drained soil.

Full and Lush, or Clean and Spaced?

How closely plants are spaced changes the whole look and the work it takes.

	Full planting	Spaced planting
Look	Lush and natural; plants grow together into one mass	Clean and contemporary; each plant stands on its own
Maintenance	Lower once established; the canopy shades out weeds	Higher; open ground needs weeding and fresh mulch
Best for	Low-maintenance beds, pollinator gardens, slopes	Modern homes, courtyards, entries
Watch for	Choosing plants that won't crowd each other out	Repeating plants so the design feels intentional, not sparse

Both work beautifully. The right choice depends on your home's style and how much time you want to spend in the garden.



The same backyard bed, planted two ways. A full planting feels lush and leaves little room for weeds, while a spaced planting shows off the shape of each shrub.

Think about it: stand at the street and look at your home. What does the landscape say about the people who live there?

How Turf Bunny helps: our designers start with a conversation about how you want to live outdoors, then create a custom design that fits both you and your home.

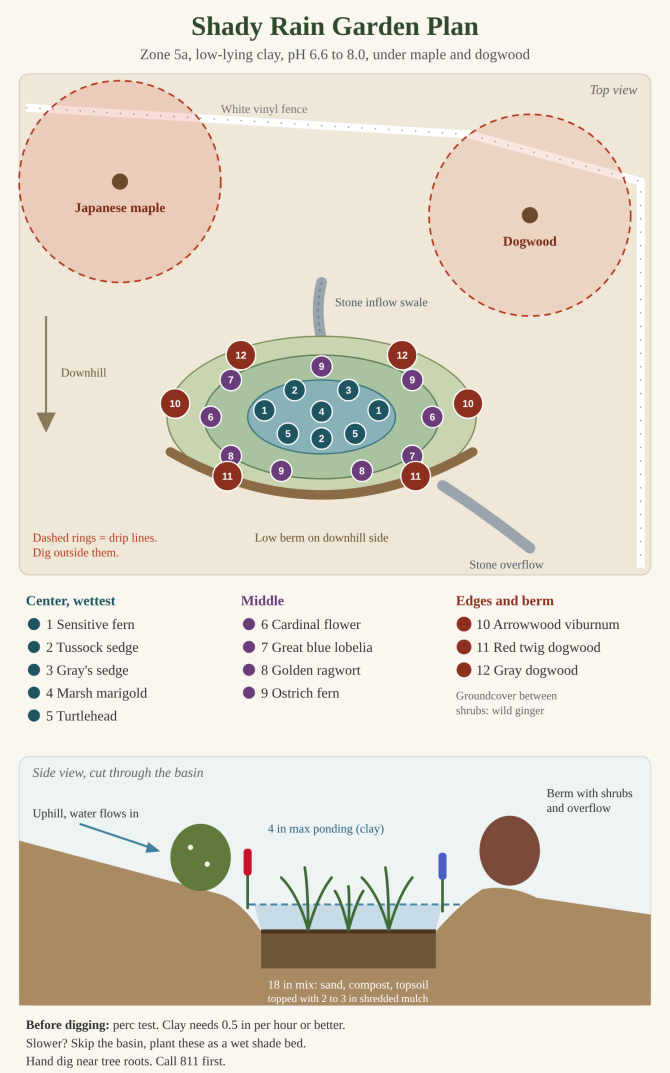
Chapter 2: Practical Landscaping for Wet, Dry, and Shady Spots

Every yard has a problem area, and most problem areas are really the wrong plant in the right place. Match the plant to the spot, and the struggle disappears.

Problem spot	What helps	Plants that thrive
Wet, soggy, or puddles after rain	A rain garden that catches water and lets it soak in	Redosier dogwood, winterberry holly, blue flag iris
Dry, sunny, or sandy	Deep-rooted, drought-tolerant plants and a layer of mulch	Little bluestem, fragrant sumac, butterfly weed
Shade under trees or beside the house	Plants built for low light, not lawn	Allegheny pachysandra, ferns, Solomon's seal



The same shady slope, before and after. Ferns, sedges, and red twig dogwood turn a soggy low spot into a rain garden that soaks up the rain.



A rain garden plan for a shady slope with clay soil. Plants that love the most water go in the center, flowers ring the middle, and shrubs hold the berm.

Pro tip: a well-built rain garden should drain within 24 to 48 hours. Water that stands longer can breed mosquitoes and drown roots.

Pro tip: near driveways and sidewalks, choose salt-tolerant plants. Winter road salt quietly damages many popular shrubs.

Think about it: where does water go when it rains hard on your property? Follow it next storm.

How Turf Bunny helps: we test how your soil drains, find where water collects, and design solutions, from rain gardens to the right plants for every wet, dry, or shady spot.

Chapter 3: Incorporate Your Herbs into Your Landscape

A garden works best as part of the yard, not an island in the lawn. When it connects to paths, views, and the house, it gets used and enjoyed.

- **Put it where you'll see it.** A vegetable or herb garden near the kitchen door gets picked; one in the back corner gets forgotten.
- **Repeat plants and colors.** Echo a few garden plants in your front beds, and the whole property feels planned.
- **Frame the view.** Place gardens where they look good from the windows you use most, not only from the street.
- **Give it a real path.** Paths at least 3 feet wide make room to walk, kneel, and push a wheelbarrow.
- **Mix beauty and harvest.** Blueberries, serviceberries, and herbs look as good in a border as in a vegetable bed.



Herbs belong in the landscape, too. A raised bed of basil, chives, sage, and thyme sits steps from the patio, framed by catmint, salvia, and ornamental grasses.

Think about it: which window do you look out most often? What would you like to see there in every season?

Chapter 4: Plant Ideas for Your Garden

The most beautiful gardens rely on leaf color, texture, and form, because flowers come and go. Plant in groups of three, five, or more so each plant makes an impact instead of looking lost.

Goal	Plant ideas
Four-season interest	Redosier dogwood for red winter stems, little bluestem for copper fall color
Pollinators	New England aster, golden alexanders, wild bergamot
Low maintenance	Fragrant sumac 'Gro-Low', creeping juniper, northern bush honeysuckle
Narrow spaces	Columnar arborvitae such as 'Brobeck's Tower'
Shade	Allegheny pachysandra, hellebores, native ferns



New England aster feeds bees in fall, when few other flowers bloom. Plant it where you can watch the visitors from the patio.

Pro tip: keep pollinator plants at least 3 feet from walkways, doors, and play areas. The bees stay busy, and your guests stay comfortable.

Pro tip: check a plant's mature size, not its size at the nursery. A cute shrub in a pot can block a window in five years.

Think about it: what does your yard look like in February? A good design looks good then too.

How Turf Bunny helps: we select plants proven in Northeast conditions, place them where they'll thrive, and install them the right way from day one.

Chapter 5: How Is Your Soil?

Soil decides what lives and what struggles, yet it's the part of the landscape most people never check. Around new homes especially, soil is often compacted by construction equipment and stripped of topsoil.

Three simple checks tell you a lot:

1. **The screwdriver test.** Push a long screwdriver into moist soil. If it stops within a few inches, the soil is compacted and roots will struggle too. The screwdriver test is a quick check at home. On site, our designers use a penetrometer to measure exactly how hard roots must push.
2. **The drainage test.** Dig a hole about 12 inches deep, fill it with water, and watch. Water still standing the next day signals a drainage problem.
3. **The soil test.** A lab test shows pH and nutrients. Your county Cornell Cooperative Extension office can point you to one.



Loose soil on the left, compacted soil on the right. A penetrometer shows how hard roots must push, so we know when soil needs loosening before we plant.

Why pH matters: some plants, like blueberries and rhododendrons, need acidic soil. Soil near foundations and sidewalks is often alkaline from concrete and lime, which quietly starves them.

Think about it: has a plant ever failed in the same spot twice? The soil may be telling you something.

How Turf Bunny helps: we test your soil before we plant, so every recommendation is based on what's actually in the ground, not guesswork.

Chapter 6: Sustainability, Small Choices That Help the Environment

A sustainable landscape usually costs less to maintain. It works with nature instead of fighting it.

- **Choose native plants.** They're adapted to local weather and feed local wildlife, from bees to songbirds.
- **Leave some ground bare.** Most native bees nest in the ground, not in hives. A thick blanket of mulch everywhere leaves them nowhere to live.
- **Keep the leaves.** Fallen leaves under shrubs protect insects over winter and feed the soil as they break down.
- **Leave some stems standing.** Hollow perennial stems become nesting spots for small bees next spring.
- **Catch the rain.** Rain gardens and rain barrels keep water on your property and out of storm drains.
- **Shrink the lawn.** Replacing unused lawn with planting beds means less mowing, watering, and fertilizer.

Pro tip: plant flowers in groups, not one of each. A drift at least 3 feet across is easier for bees and butterflies to spot, and they can feed efficiently without flying from plant to plant across the yard.



Native plants feed local wildlife. Red bee balm, native to the Northeast, brings hummingbirds to the garden in midsummer.

Think about it: how much of your lawn do you actually walk on?

Chapter 7: Ensuring Success

Most plant failures trace back to planting day, not to the plant. These steps separate a landscape that thrives from one that needs replacing.

1. **Call before you dig.** In New York, call 811 a few days ahead so buried utilities get marked. It's free and required.
2. **Find the root flare.** The flare, where the trunk widens into roots, should sit at or slightly above the soil. Arborvitae and trees planted too deep slowly decline.
3. **Check container roots.** Roots circling the pot will keep circling in the ground. Loosen them or slice through the outer layer before planting.
4. **Handle B&B trees with care.** Set balled-and-burlapped trees on firm soil, then cut away twine, the top of the wire basket, and any plastic burlap.
5. **Mulch the right way.** Spread 2 to 3 inches, and keep it a few inches from trunks. Mulch piled against the bark invites rot and pests.
6. **Water through the first season.** New plants need about an inch of water a week until their roots reach out into native soil.



Plant so the root flare shows at the soil line, not buried like a fence post. Loosen circling roots before planting so they grow outward.

Think about it: a landscape is an investment that grows. The first year sets the pace for the next twenty.

Pro Tips at a Glance

- ☐ Plant arborvitae and trees with the root flare at or slightly above the soil.
- ☐ Remove twine, the top of the wire basket, and plastic burlap from B&B trees.
- ☐ Loosen or cut roots circling a container before planting.
- ☐ Keep pollinator plants at least 3 feet from walkways and doors.

- ☐ Choose salt-tolerant plants near driveways and sidewalks.
- ☐ Make sure a rain garden drains within 24 to 48 hours.
- ☐ Keep mulch 2 to 3 inches deep and off the trunk.
- ☐ Call 811 before you dig.

Meet Your Design Team



Stephani Daniels, Residential & Commercial Landscape Design Stephani has helped dozens of homeowners and businesses turn ideas into finished landscapes. She guides you from the first concept through plant choices, soil testing, and planting, so every decision is a practical one.



Manny Santos, Plant Selection & Site Knowledge Cornell-trained in landscape design, Manny is the team's strategist and consultant. Manny brings creative ideas and technical know-how to every plan, weighing sun, soil, drainage, mature size, and upkeep, so your landscape thrives instead of struggles.



Alex Gayheart, Field Operations Manager Alex leads the crews that install every Turf Bunny landscape design. Your plan is built the way it was drawn, with one person accountable from the first plant to the final layer of mulch.

Ready for a Plan?

Every idea in this guide works better when it's fitted to your property. As your neighborhood landscape design expert, Turf Bunny brings it all together:

- **Landscape design** built around your goals and your home's style
- **Soil testing** so plants start in the right ground
- **Drainage testing** to solve wet spots before they become problems
- **Planting and installation** done right, from root flare to mulch

Let's create a space you'll love. Our team is ready to help you shape an outdoor space that fits your home, your yard, and the way you live.

Contact Turf Bunny to schedule: call 518.231.6794 · info@turfbunny.com · TurfBunny.com

Scan to get a quote.



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