

Sustainable landscape has earth-friendly benefits

By Brandi Schlossberg

You don't have to travel far to help save the world — you can start in your own backyard. A sustainable landscape not only will help save water, but it also will help clean the air and improve the soil, among other earth-friendly benefits.

Tom Stille, owner of Interpretive Gardens in Reno, has been promoting sustainable landscaping in Northern Nevada for more than 25 years. A landscape architect and horticulturist, Stille's designs center on food production, sustainability and low maintenance, depending on client needs.

"We encourage homeowners to grow some of their own food — even if it's just a few fruit trees and shrubs that will help reduce the cost of bringing food great distances to our community," Stille said.

"We also encourage clients to develop their garden spaces using less water," he continued, "to

reduce lawn areas to an amount they will really use, and to grow a diverse and adaptable group of plants to add beauty and habitat for other living things."

Sustainable landscaping in Northern Nevada starts with selecting plants appropriate to the high-desert environment — plants that can thrive without a lot of water.

"I feel as if I'm in the mountains or in a beautiful scenic place, not just an enclosed yard," said Katharine Hakala, whose south Reno home is surrounded by sustainable landscaping. "It's also easy to take care of, and we don't use a whole lot of water."

To further preserve water, Stille incorporates storm-water management into landscape design, using water that runs off roofs, driveways and paths on the project site.

"We harvest the water for our landscape plants to

THE SUSTAINABLE YARD

Select earth-friendly landscaping and harvest a variety of benefits, including:

- Cleaner air
- Improved soil quality
- Reduced use of water
- Homegrown food
- Greater biodiversity
- Safe wildlife habitat
- A chemical-free yard

use," he said. "This in turn reduces our need to add treated potable water through irrigation systems."

Trees are another important aspect of earth-friendly landscaping, as they help clean the air and provide habitat for wildlife. In addition, using organic matter and mulches can improve a yard's soil, keeping it cooler in summer and warmer in winter.

"The benefits of sustainable landscaping are many," Stille said. "An environmentally conscious landscape provides a safe haven for families, their pets and wildlife, free from synthetic fertilizers and chemical treatments.

"What's good for homeowners is good for the community is good for the planet," he added. "It's all connected." 