

accessories

Let your creativity reign when it comes to landscape accessories. Fortunately, you can find a green alternative for almost any design element. As a general rule, keep things simple. You'll have less to buy, maintain, and deal within the long run. Common landscape accessories include lawn and patio furniture, pots and planters, and lighting.

Furniture

Lawn and patio furniture comes in all shapes and sizes. In addition to aesthetics and durability, focus on environmental performance. If possible, outdoor furniture should be stored in a dry location for the winter. If not, make rot-resistance a priority. Green materials choices for outdoor furniture include naturally rot-resistant, responsibly harvested wood certified by the FSC (see page 11), as well as recycled-content plastic.

Rot-resistant wood is a good option for outdoors, but many species of wood are over-harvested—especially many tropical hardwoods known for their durability, such as teak. Other species with similar rot resistance, such as eucalyptus, are available with FSC certification.

Another popular material for outdoor use? Plastic, especially *polyvinyl chloride* (PVC). Debate continues, however, on the human and environmental effects of PVC production and disposal. Moreover, recycling opportunities for PVC consumer products are essentially nonexistent at this time. PVC-free alternatives exist, however, including a wide variety of outdoor furniture with recycled content, which makes use of materials otherwise destined for the landfill. California's Integrated Waste Management Board maintains a Recycled Content Product Database, including a section on outdoor furniture; go to www.ciwmb.ca.gov/RCP/ and click on *Furniture and Accessories*.

Pots and Planters

Add flexibility and seasonal color to the landscape with pots and planters. Best of all, it's easy to be environmentally responsible with these design elements. You can find planters fabricated from a wide variety of materials, including materials suitable for decking; see the *Decks* on page 10. For a list of planters and pots with recycled content, go to www.ciwmb.ca.gov/RCP/ and click on *Agriculture & Landscape*, and then *Planters*.

Lighting

Improve the safety and security of your landscape with outdoor lighting. However, excessive landscape lighting can waste energy and result in light pollution, disrupting neighbors and reducing the ability to see nighttime stars. A careful lighting scheme reduces light pollution while providing just enough light for safety and security. The International Dark Sky Association maintains a simple sheet at www.darksky.org/infoshts/pdf/is186.pdf describing strategies for reducing light pollution. *Low-voltage* outdoor lighting systems usually consume less energy and are safer to operate than lighting operating on regular household current.

Avoid increased energy costs related to outdoor lighting, as well as the expense of hardwiring conventional outdoor lights, with solar lighting. Available in many styles, solar-powered landscape lights store energy accumulated during the day in batteries, and then provide low-level light at night. In general, solar garden lights provide a limited amount of light—enough to mark a trail but not enough to illuminate activities.

Photo top left and bottom left: © Jacqueline Koch. Photo opposite, third from top: Built Green™ Idea Home, designed by Mithun and built by Bennett Homes.