Landscaping on the New Frontier

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On first glance, a landscaping book that mentions “waterwise” in the title suggests that water conservation would be a major theme. But, while this subject is certain to become more pressing as population growth inevitably intersects with a finite supply, it’s not just about water. Traditional cultivated landscapes in the Intermountain West—carpet lawns, isolated trees, rows of shrubs, and decorative patches of flowers—are borrowed. True, such landscapes serve a variety of functions and appeal to a tidy aesthetic. But “Norway” maple, “Austrian” pine, “Chinese” juniper, “Kentucky” bluegrass, and “Persian” lilac all illustrate that something is missing. That something is the Intermountain West.

To anyone who has marveled at the natural beauty evident in our wild landscapes and felt a desire to capture even a small portion of this beauty in a home landscape, *Landscaping on the New Frontier* is written just for you. To the skeptic disappointed by the notion that native plant gardens are doomed to become “a patch of weeds or a pile of rocks,” prepare to be pleasantly surprised. And to all who at one time or another have assumed that native landscapes are either completely carefree (i.e., because wild places look beautiful without a gardener) or are essentially like traditional landscaping, just with different plants, prepare to be educated, with the assurance that the journey will be richly rewarding.

Just as communities of people—with diverse skills and contributions—unite to make a better place to live, the concept of plant community is critical in designing intermountain landscapes. Because our region is characterized by a wide diversity of landscapes, a basic knowledge of these plant communities is essential in designing a yard that will express your creativity while capturing the beauty of native landscapes and respecting the real-world conditions of your property. Thus, much of the thrust of this book is aimed at helping you to understand the native plant communities that are available for inspiration. Subsequent chapters provide the practical how-to’s of design, installation, irrigation, and maintenance. A plant palette section provides details on native species that have been shown to thrive when used appropriately in home landscapes in
the Intermountain West. And for those who need a little extra inspiration before taking the plunge, seven genuine, intermountain native, home landscapes are highlighted by the gardeners who created them.

Gardening on the new frontier may initially seem strange and even radical to those accustomed to the sameness of most traditional landscapes—“What do you mean I shouldn’t add topsoil before planting desert shrubs?” But the complexity, beauty, and flexibility of an intermountain native landscape make it immensely satisfying, and native gardening can be so much more interesting than traditional gardening. If you didn’t at least partially believe this, you probably wouldn’t be consulting this book (except, of course, in the interest of reducing the amount of water required in your yard). But, as even a brief perusal of the consistently enthusiastic testimonials of those who agreed to share their stories will illustrate, venturing into the new frontier does much more than conserve water. Indeed, even modest success in this effort will meaningfully connect the living space immediately surrounding your home with the beauty inherent in native plant communities. And, for me at least, the ability to leave my yard for days or weeks in the summer and not worry about what it will look like when I return is definitely a bonus.

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