

# Beauty and Sustainability

*gardens for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*



## *Natural Gardener*

*by Victoria Mills*

Every gardener knows that to nurture the nature around us is a gift; the benefits to mind and body are manifold. The 21st century offers new vision and potential to realize the benefits of landscaping by synthesizing the best of the past with current-day innovations. Indeed, there has never been a more critical time to tend to the Earth that is closest at hand. As urbanization entwines with the natural systems upon which we depend, we have new opportunities to inspire beauty while creating habitat, celebrating water and rejuvenating soil. The gift of gardening will be enriched and more rewarding.

To incorporate sustainable landscaping into our communities is to value nature's role in our cities and suburbs. Native plants are well-adapted to local environmental conditions, maintain or improve soil fertility, reduce erosion, and often require less fertilizer and pesticides than many alien plants. These characteristics save time and money and reduce the amount of harmful runoff threatening the aquatic resources of our streams, rivers and lakes. Functionally healthy and established natural communities are better able to resist invasions by alien plant species. Consider the following ways to create beauty and sustainability in our 21st century landscapes.

### **Restore Our Home Habitats and Our Regional Environment**

- Enhance ecosystem functions that celebrate water and biodiversity
- Minimize disturbance to remnant natural areas, creating smallest "footprint"

- Protect natural wetlands, streams and rivers, incorporating natural drainage into design
- Use low-impact construction techniques while building and planting
- Begin with an accurate topographical site plan
- Provide food, shelter and water to support local wildlife
- Plant like nature - in dense layers - avoid mulch wastelands

### **Protect Trees**

- Evaluate trees using a professional arborist
- If trees must be removed, early in the construction process is best
- Avoid grade changes near trees and mounds that smother roots

### **Conserve Energy and Water**

- With less lawn, mowers and blowers consume less fuel and money, and reduce pollution and noise
- Minimize household energy use—plant wind breaks and shade trees
- Use hand rather than power tools, electric rather than gas tools; 2-cycle are the worst offenders
- Rely on rain: between rain and irrigation, only an inch per week is necessary
- Celebrate nature's great resource: capture rain with rain barrels, rain gardens, green roofs, bio-swales and French drains

### **Laudable Lawns**

- Adjust attitudes toward weeds, tolerating a few weeds in favor of heavy pesticides
- Convert lawn to alternative ground-cover or gardens
- Plant no-mow seed when planning lawn sections
- Set mower blade height at 3"
- Test soil to determine nutrient needs
- Use plant-based or organic fertilizer instead of synthetics with heavy salt and chemicals

### **Eco-friendly Materials**

- Understand a material's origins and contents, including toxicity
- Be aware: some materials become harmful as they break down
- Please reuse or recycle materials
- Use solar lighting or energy-efficient fixtures
- Install permeable pavement

### **Plant to Support the Web of Life**

- Reduce yard waste by leaving nitrogen-rich grass clippings on your lawn or composting leaves and grass into rich humus
- Avoid pesticides - use natural controls, such as the Integrated Pest Management methodology
- Use native plants, as they are most adapted to local soils and climate
- Learn about invasive species, then work to eradicate them
- Spread the word and volunteer to create more sustainable landscapes. 🌱

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