

GREEN TECH THE SERIES COLUMN FOR MARCH 30, 2016

HEADLINE: NATIVE AND STIMULATING YARDS ARE POSSIBLE

Every year around this time Donna and I begin what seems the annual, “how do we make our garden grow” discussion and if you have followed us in the past you will know we have a passion for natural living including in our gardens. Last year, with the new spa it created the need to really look at where this year’s landscape work needed to go. Using one of our favorite sources, Kijiji, we found some excess architectural stone, a lot actually. It will be used to further reduce the lawn area. As well, we will be adding more raised planters and introducing more native plants, shrubs and trees. We also have the side benefit of a sloped lawn which makes elevated or “stacking,” as it’s now called, easier to blend into our lawn.

Naturalization of lawns and gardens is not new; however, it is becoming a necessity as reducing or hopefully eliminating pesticides, reducing the use of water and especially in urban areas, treated water and making a home stimulating and calm. Coupled with the popularity of the “outdoor room,” for relaxation and entertaining, it makes the reduction of garden work an even more enticing benefit.

A recent study by NASA shows that lawns in the US take up more surface area than irrigated crops. A staggering estimated 32 million acres of fertilized, watered lawns, most of which are manicured by gas powered lawn mowers is a stunning revelation. The other fact, though, is that this is changing as more homeowners realize a “permaculture approach,” coupled with micro vegetable gardens, this can be blended and be effective. Another US program actually certifies a backyard habitat for use of native plants, storm water management, pesticide reduction and wildlife stewardship. In our current yard, we have one large lilac bush and, other than some decorative cedars we planted along the property line for privacy, not much else. I was concerned we would not attract any birds, which can add so much to a yard. We put up one pole mount and one wall mount feeder and, as the saying goes, “feed them and they will come” and they did. Our yard is alive with numerous kinds of birds, as well as deer. Until we wrapped them in burlap, the deer found the cedars great snacks. Many of our B&B and Spa guests commented on the variety of birds.

The permaculture approach tries to create low maintenance areas in a garden. In our case, we will stack, by means of the recycled stone, container type planting areas, starting around the bird feeders. Using planters, either on grade or stacking

allowed by landscape, slows down storm water flow, capturing it within the planters and also allowing for edged native plants around the planters to extend their range, thereby reducing further the amount of grass as well. While this may seem a lot of work, we are working on a long term plan, over a couple or three years, to see how each year evolves.

Designing a natural garden requires some research. We have a large open south facing lawn so attention to plants that survive in the sun is premier in our plans. That said, while zoning the design, and it can be more than one zone of complimentary plants and flowers, allows you to radiate from a large stacked planter or garden circle and over years add plants that complement the existing zone. We know that working out from the home reduces walking time and keeps the gardens in perspective, which results in the tendency to better care for them. We added some trees last year, mostly fruit trees that will take some time and, this year within the zones, we hope to add some shade trees to protect plants from the sun.

The popularity of native plants is changing how many garden centers stock their yards. It's no secret that native plants stand a better chance of surviving. Once established, their maintenance is reduced and they offer a greater potential for carbon capture. In order to accommodate and retain our wild bird population, the right kinds of plants, such as elderberry, are needed. Similarly, with the right kind of milkweed, there is a possibility of attracting butterfly's, too, with hope there may be a monarch or two arrive.

Now for our list of 2016 sustainable garden essentials. We are going to use more mulch, it helps contain moisture, reduce weeds and add color to the planters as the ground cover grows. Secondly, we plan to increase our use of compost; we now have two small plastic compost containers that are difficult to access. This year, I will build a larger one that allows us to aerate and better access the humus, once ready. Thirdly, we expect to buy or build a worm farm to enrich our soil over time. Lastly, I am going to try an insectary planter or plot. Research has shown me that attracting various bugs will help our garden over time; this is really an experiment for me, so we shall see here.

The last thing for 2016's garden is to increase the number of raised beds for more vegetables. Currently, they are all along the south side of the church and at the front of the spa. We built these raised gardens last year and they worked great, thus allowing Donna to enjoy her hobby without the back breaking effort of kneeling down to a grade based garden; we are getting older, after all.

As we progress with the reduction of grass, I intend to do a later column showing how we did this at reasonable cost, utilizing recycled stone, landscape grade white cedar timbers and plain old sweat labor!

Questions or Comments: Cam Allen L.I.W. NHI ACI LEED Green Assoc
E-mail: cam@alltechconsultinggroup.com