Low-Maintenance, Natural Landscapes
Reduce your Carbon Footprint & Promote Pollinators

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Key Points of today's discussion:

• What is a “Low-Maintenance” Landscape?
  - Conventions
  - Misconceptions

• What are the costs of Conventional Vs. Natural Landscapes?
  - The Time Vs. Money Quotient
  - The price we pay

• What If? Landscaping the Natural way:
  - Some basic overarching design principles
  - Landscape design, elements of natural landscapes
  - Environmental Benefits

• Stewardship, and Neighborly Impacts:
  - What impacts do our landscape practices have on our neighbors?
  - What we can do to be better stewards of the land and neighbors?
Low Maintenance Landscapes. What does that really mean?
Low Maintenance Landscapes?

Different things to different people.

But, Generally when asked for a “Low Maintenance” Landscape
The average person/client is asking for a landscape with:

- Less Pruning or Trimming of Deciduous and Evergreen shrubs.
- Less Weeding
- Less Watering
- Less Work
- Less Time Invested
The Conventional Front Yard Landscape in the U.S. Since at least the 1950’s

- Highly Manicured
- Lacks Bio-Diversity
- High Maintenance
Beginning in the 19th century. Using European grazed pastures and 18th-century formal gardens as their model, the Garden Clubs of America, the U.S. Golf Association, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture embarked on a campaign to landscape American lawns with a “Carpet of Green”. With the invention and spread of the lawn mower, the "common man" could have the same cropped turf as that of an aristocrat's mansion.

The “Origin Story” of today’s conventional landscape

The American Dream?
Societal Misconceptions

Conventional  VS.  Natural
Non-Native Turf Grass Lawn = “Clean, Neat and Tidy”  
Ecological Desert for Beneficial Insects = High Economic Inputs

Natural Native Prairie Meadow = “Overly Wild” or “Messy Landscape”  
But… Incredible Bio-Diversity = Low Long-Term Economic Inputs
**Myth:**
"Natural landscapes lower property values because they are messy and unattractive."

**The Reality:**
• Positive effect on property values.
• Developers charge more for naturally landscaped homes than for homes in areas with traditional landscaping.
• Natural features like woodland corridors can preserve and strengthen a community's unique characteristics.
• As well as for environmental benefits like reduced stormwater runoff and improved wildlife habitat.
High Inputs = High Costs

Conventional Landscape Practices:
Ownership of Lawn and Garden Equipment:
- In the year 2020, approximately 228.73 million Americans owned lawn and garden equipment. Including: Lawn mowers, trimmers, and other tools used for maintaining outdoor spaces.

Time Spent Mowing Lawns:
- On average, Americans spend over 384 hours of their lifetime mowing their lawns.
- That’s equivalent to approximately 16 days dedicated to keeping those grassy patches in check.

Household Expenditure on Lawn Care and Gardening:
- In 2017, the average spend per household on lawn care and gardening in the United States amounted to $503 per year. This includes expenses related to lawn mowers, fertilizers, seeds, and other gardening supplies.

It’s All Too Much!
No Garden or Landscape is No Maintenance.

So, Choose Wisely!
Natural Landscapes with an Intentional layout = Organization = Tidiness

The Happy Medium
Five fundamental principles of design:

1. **Unity and Harmony:**

2. **Balance and Proportion:**

3. **Rhythm and Repetition:**

4. **Emphasis and Focus:**

5. **Simplicity:**
Unity and Harmony:

This principle emphasizes the coherence and interconnectedness of all elements in a landscape design. Achieving unity ensures that the various components—such as plants, hardscape features, and structures—work together harmoniously to create a whole.
Balance refers to the distribution of visual weight in a landscape design, ensuring that one side doesn't feel heavier or busier than the other. Proportion involves the relationship between different elements' sizes and scales within the landscape. Maintaining balance and proportion ensures visual stability and a pleasing aesthetic.
Rhythm and Repetition:

Rhythm creates a sense of movement and flow within a landscape, guiding the eye smoothly through the space. Repetition of certain elements, such as plant groupings, colors, or forms, helps establish a cohesive rhythm and reinforces visual continuity.
Emphasis and Focus:

This principle directs attention to specific focal points or areas within the landscape. By highlighting key features or focal points, such as a specimen tree, sculpture, or architectural element, designers can create visual interest and draw viewers into the space.
Simplicity: Simplicity involves the thoughtful editing and restraint in the design process, avoiding clutter and complexity. A simple design allows the beauty of individual elements to shine and promotes ease of maintenance. Simplicity also contributes to a sense of tranquility and balance within the landscape.
Landscape Design the Native/Natural Way.
Finding Harmony between the Conventional and the Natural
Natural landscape design principles

• Connectivity
• Plant Diversity
• Layered Planting
• Habitat Diversity/Shelter, Nesting Sites & Water sources
• Seasonal Interest
• Native Plant Selection
Connectivity

Design your landscape to facilitate the movement of pollinators by creating corridors and connectivity between natural areas, green spaces, and gardens to support their foraging and breeding activities.
Plant Diversity

Incorporate a wide variety of native plants with different bloom times, flower shapes, colors, and sizes to provide a continuous and diverse food source for pollinators throughout the growing season.
Layered Planting

Design your landscape with layers of vegetation, including trees, shrubs, perennials, and groundcovers, to create diverse habitats and microclimates that support a wide range of pollinators.
Habitat Diversity

Integrate various habitat elements such as meadows, woodlands, wetlands, and water features to support different pollinator species with diverse habitat preferences and nesting requirements.
Provide Shelter, Nesting Sites & Water sources

Include features such as brush piles, deadwood, rockeries, and nesting boxes to provide shelter, nesting sites, and overwintering habitat for pollinators.

Incorporate shallow water sources such as birdbaths, ponds, or small streams to provide drinking water for pollinators, especially during hot and dry periods.
Seasonal Interest

Aim for a landscape that offers visual interest and blooms in every season to support pollinators year-round. Incorporate early blooming spring flowers, summer-flowering plants, and fall-blooming species to provide continuous forage.
Native Plant Selection

Native plants share a long evolutionary history with their pollinators, so including a wide variety of natives will make your garden a favorite destination for pollinators. Choose carefully to match the site conditions; natives will flourish without the addition of fertilizers and pesticides.
Humanize

Human elements are welcoming and invite the viewer into the landscape. Some options are paths, patios, benches, sculptures, water features. They add to the perception that the landscape is planned and not untended.
What does it mean to be a good Steward/Neighbor? or Citizen in your community? or our Global community?

What impacts are Conventional Landscaping having on Society as a whole?

That land is a community is a basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics. - ALDO LEOPOLD
The National Wildlife Federation estimates that 18 percent of municipal solid waste collected annually is organic yard waste: Cut grass, raked leaves, branch trimmings, and dead ornamentals. All of this material can be used in the natural landscape for compost, mulch, brush piles, or wildlife food or shelter.
Some Impacts of Conventional Landscape Practices:

Noise Pollution

1. Gasoline-Powered Lawn Mowers:
   • Noise Level: Gas-powered lawn mowers typically range from 82 to 90 decibels.

2. Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers:
   • Noise Level: Gas-powered leaf blowers create a racket in the range of 80 to 92 decibels.

3. Weed Whackers (String Trimmers):
   • Noise Level: Weed whackers produce approximately 96 decibels of noise.

4. Hedge Trimmers:
   • Noise Level: Hedge trimmers can blast away at 103 decibels.


*By Comparison:*

Rock concerts usually have decibel levels ranging between 90 to 100 dB.

**NOTE:** This range is concerning because sounds above 85 dB are considered harmful to human hearing.
Step Away from the Rake, and Leave the Leaves!
Another Alternative: Backyard Composting
Get This in Return!
Landscape garden waste that pays you back
Some Low Maintenance Benefits:
Instead of requiring intensive fall preparation, natural landscapes function best if stalks and seedheads are left standing and leaf litter is not raked away. Seedheads provide winter food for songbirds; stalks make winter shelter for beneficial insects. Leaf litter enriches the soil, shelters overwintering insects and spiders, and insulates hibernating amphibians.
The Conventional Landscape = Status Quo.

Less of these practices.
The Natural Landscape Form

And a little more of this!
In Summary:

What are some of the advantages of a Low Maintenance Natural Landscape?

• Can be accomplished though organized Landscape Planning
• Reduces Long-term Maintenance and associated costs ($ VS. Time)
• Frees up Time for other activities
• Promotes the use of Native Plant materials
• Improves Habitat for Pollinators, Beneficial Insects, and other Wildlife
• Increases overall Biodiversity
• Reduces our Carbon Footprint, by reducing need for Fossil Fuels
• Reduces noise pollution
• Environmentally Friendly
"By finding alternatives to lawns, you can do wonderful things on your own property to protect the environment. Each little island, each corridor will help bring back the butterflies and birds."

Lorrie Otto, founder of Wild Ones
Resources:

Books on Landscaping with Native Plants
- Landscaping With Native Plants of Wisconsin by Lynn Steiner
- Birdscaping in the Midwest by Mariette Nowak
- Native Plants in the Home Landscape by Keith Gerard Nowakowski

Books about Pollinators:
- Attracting Native Pollinators edited by The Xerces Society

Web Resources:
- https://hort.extension.wisc.edu
- www.xerces.org
- https://centralwisconsin.wildones.org
Native Plant ID: Books
Additional Online Resources

- https://hort.extension.wisc.edu/pollinators/
- https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/
- https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/endangeredresources/nativeplants.html
- https://uwarboretum.org/
Thank You!

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