

landscape trends

green in the garden

Eco-friendly tips and ideas
for your landscape

By Phyllis Gricus

Your garden may look green, but it can be harmful to the environment. And gardeners, along with the products they use, can be some of the biggest offenders. Minimize the negative impact your spot of Eden has on the world by employing sustainable gardening methods. The following pages offer a few ideas to get you started.

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Bee friendly

The wild pollinators, native bees—often small, stingless, solitary and unglamorous compared to honeybees—are also in decline. The primary reasons for the decline are the use of pesticides and development where there used to be habitat.

Pesticides applied in agricultural settings are being done by trained professionals, while those applying pesticide at home are often using far greater concentrations than necessary; allowable concentrations are often much higher for home use.

Why do we need pollinators? Almost all of the world's seed plants—plants that feed us—need to be pollinated. Your garden can attract native bee populations if you plant native plants—they're four times more attractive to native bees than exotics.

Choose plants that bloom throughout the season to attract bees all year long. Diversity is important, but it doesn't mean planting one of each species; small groups of the same flowering plants work well.

The early spring blooms of redbud (*Cercis Canadensis*) and rhododendrons (*Rhododendron* spp.) provide the first nectar of the year. Beebalm (*Mondarda fistulosa*) and Butterflyweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) are summer favorites. Goldenrod (*Solidago speciosa*) and New England Aster (*Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*) offer blooms through October.

Native bees are important to the ecosystem by helping to pollinate plants and flowers.

Photo courtesy of Phyllis Gricus.



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If you're interested in making your garden pollinator-friendly—which also benefits a wide range of other wildlife—check out the resources at www.xerces.org.





Photo courtesy of Phyllis Giroux.

ABOVE: Companion planting can help keep bugs away and improves soil health.

Best Buds

Companion planting is about plants helping each other out. The natural chemicals produced by one plant can help keep bugs away, keep the soil healthy and improve the flavor and growth of its neighbor. You can discourage harmful pests without losing the beneficial insects by planting a specific mix of flowers, herbs, or vegetables in proximity to each other. In essence, companion planting helps bring a balanced ecosystem to your garden.

Companion planting has been a practice since ancient times and is primarily used in the vegetable garden. The Native American's Three Sisters garden, which interplants corn, beans and squash, is a well-known example. Very little scientific research has been funded to prove why such partnerships work; however, the anecdotal evidence is hard to ignore.

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If you're interested in companion planting, this book is a good resource: *Great Garden Companions: A Companion-Planting System for a Beautiful, Chemical-Free Vegetable Garden*

Tricks OF THE Trade

Thanks to innovative thinkers and leaders, Pittsburgh has made the transformation from smokestack industry to green economy with a commitment to sustainability. A regional catalyst in the sustainable landscape arena is Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens. With the building of their new Center for Sustainable Landscapes, not only is the building going to exceed LEED® Platinum certification, but the highest green standards will also be extended to the landscape. The surrounding grounds are designed in a way that will restore the natural landscape function, provide wildlife habitat and use rainwater only for irrigation.

Phipps offers both adult learning and professional certificate programs on gardening sustainably. Go to www.phipps conservatory.org to learn more about the programs.



Photo by Craig Thompson



Black Gold

Black gold is the invaluable product of composting—the natural recycling of organic waste into a nutrient-rich soil amendment. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, Americans throw out more than 25% of the food we prepare and most of that goes into landfills. And that food waste, because of lack of oxygen in landfills, produces the greenhouse gas methane.

If food waste were composted instead of being sent to landfills, the resulting reduction in greenhouse gas emissions would be equivalent to taking more than two million cars off the road.

Compost, when added to the soil improves soil health, aids in erosion resistance and improves water retention. It also works as a slow-acting fertilizer, which lasts a long time in the soil. You would be feeding the soil—for the benefit of plants—with organic matter, reducing your need for garden chemicals.

Mulching is another way to be sustainable in the garden. And compost is an excellent mulch to use in garden beds or top-dressing the lawn. In comparison to wood mulch, compost mulch helps to restore ecological processes to nutrient-poor, degraded soils.

TOP LEFT: Compost feeds soil organically, reducing the need for garden chemicals. **TOP RIGHT:** Composting food waste helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions. **LEFT:** A compost bin can be attractive and functional.

Photo courtesy of Phyllis Gricus.

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Check out *Compost: By Douglas Green* (Kindle Edition) for more enlightening tips to create your own compost.



Photo courtesy of Phyllis Gricus.

This rain garden accentuates the front yard of Lami Grubb Architects in Edgewood.

Water, water, everywhere

When it rains, Pittsburgh has an over abundance of water. Stormwater runoff causes flooding, erodes hillsides, destroys habitats and washes pollutants into our waterways through our sewer system.

Stormwater management is a challenging environmental problem in our region. Alcosan Sewer Authority, the city of Pittsburgh and 82 additional municipalities have been court-ordered to develop a plan to fix the problem. Homeowners can

also do their part to help solve the problem by incorporating rain gardens into their landscapes.

A rain garden is a planted depression designed to soak up a few inches of water runoff from a roof, driveway, or other paved surface. The water slowly seeps into the ground, replenishing the earth instead of heading for the nearest sewer pipe.

Rain gardens are easier to maintain, less expensive over time, attractive and more



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For more information about rain gardens and local initiatives go to www.raingardenalliance.org, www.cleanriverscampaign.org and www.ninemilerun.org.

efficient than many conventional stormwater management solutions. 🌱

Phyllis Gricus is the owner of Landscape Design Studio in Pittsburgh, creating sustainable and imaginative gardens for all seasons.