

ECO-FRIENDLY YARD & GARDEN MAINTENANCE

HUMBER NURSERIES 'GREEN THUMB GUIDE'



We would like to make a few suggestions that can help you create and maintain your yard in an eco-friendly manner. It is important to realize that there are many variables in nature and the suggestions made here may not work in all situations.

INSECT & DISEASE CONTROL

This is what most people think about in terms of eco-friendly or organic gardening the avoidance of chemicals or the use of friendly products in controlling insects and diseases (**See our Green Thumb Guide to 'Insect & Disease Control Without Chemicals' GT 103-09 for further information**). Controlling pests or problems naturally is important, but there are many more things that we can do to manage our yards in an eco-friendly way. Prevention is the most effective approach. With some forethought and planning, you can even use various plants in your garden that will deter insects. (**See our Green Thumb Guide to 'Companion Plants That Deter Insects' GT 337-08 for further details**)

CLEAN UP

A key step to preventing problems in the garden is taking the time to do a thorough yard clean up in the spring and fall. By removing debris that can provide shelter or food for diseases, pests, and insects, you reduce the amount of time, effort and cost to correct problems later on. This would include things like raking up leaves, twigs and branches, cutting back and removing perennial foliage, topping up the mulch in your beds, etc. By getting in the yard early in the season and after leaves have fallen, you also can spot problems before they get out of control.



SOIL

Eco-Friendly Gardening revolves around a healthy soil. Composting is an excellent way to add important nutrients and improve drainage. (**Also see our Green Thumb Guide to 'Compost' GT 301-08**) Plants in healthy soil are less likely to need chemical fertilizer and pesticides; they receive all they need from the nutrient rich soil they are planted in.

ATTRACTING BIRDS AND BATS

Not commonly thought of as part of eco-friendly gardening, birds and bats can do an excellent job of controlling insect populations in your yard. Try installing birdhouses that are suitable for Tree Swallows, Purple Martins, Sparrows and Finches. These are a just few species of local birds that are excellent at catching insects. Another tip is setting up a birdbath, which can make a big difference in deciding whose yard the bird chooses to call home. It should be no deeper than 3" in the centre and have a rough edge for the birds grab onto.

Bats do most of their feeding at dusk and give the added benefit of producing a premium fertilizer called guano, which can be collected underneath the bat house. There are very specific requirements for the placement of bat houses and it may still take a year or two for them to move in (**See our Green Thumb Guide to 'Birds In Your Garden' GT 301-08 for further details**).



LAWNS

By keeping your grass at a length of 2½" – 3" (6 – 7.5 cm) you cut the likelihood of weeds getting established. The lawn will also develop a deeper root system, reducing the amount of water required. Try to mow your lawn every 5 days in the spring and fall and avoid cutting more than 1/3 of the grass blade when mowing. By using a mulching mower and leaving your clippings on the ground, you can reduce the amount of fertilizer required by approx. 25%. It is recommended that you over-seed your lawn at least once per season, either in the spring or fall, to keep it thick and healthy.

To prevent weed seeds from germinating, you can apply Corn Gluten, which is a pre-emergent, in April (or when the Forsythia is in flower). However, it is important to note that Corn Gluten will not actually kill weeds. To get rid of existing weeds in your lawn, you will need to pull them and try to remove as much of the root as possible.

XERISCAPING

Xeriscape landscaping, by definition, is landscaping designed specifically for areas that are susceptible to drought, or for properties where water conservation is practiced.

Advantages of Xeriscaping:

- Lower water bills
- More water available for other uses and other people (such as showers, sinks, etc.).
- Less time and work needed for yard maintenance, making gardening more simple and stress-free.

Because Xeriscaping normally involves removing some or all of your lawn, little or no lawn mowing is required (saving time and energy). Xeriscape plants along with proper bed design tend to take full advantage of rainfall. When water restrictions are implemented, xeriscape plants will tend to survive, while more traditional plants may be unable to adapt.

Visit these two websites to gather more information:

The City of Toronto

<http://www.toronto.ca/watereff/tips/xeriscaping.htm>

Landscape Ontario:

<http://www.landscapontario.com/c?c=1123>

Recommended Plants:

Perennials

- Astilbe
- Bee Balm
- Blue Fescue
- Black Eyed Susan
- Coneflower
- Coral Bells
- Iris
- Phlox
- Stonecrop

Shrubs

- Barberry
- Boxwood
- Cinquefoil
- Deutzia
- Elderberry
- Mock-Oranae

Bulbs

- Allium
- Crocus
- Daffodil
- Hyacinth
- Tulip

Trees

- American Beech
- Black Walnut
- Bur Oak
- Honey Locust
- Red Cedar
- Red Maple
- Silver Maple
- Sugar Maple
- White Pine
- White Spruce

RAIN BARRELS

This is an easy way to reduce run off into the municipal sewer system and your use of city water for the garden. Rainwater is also better for your plants, as it hasn't been treated with chlorine.

Most rain barrels hold up to approx. 60 gallons of water. You can set up one or two rain barrels per downspout, depending on your needs. You can check on-line for drip irrigation systems and diverters to redirect the flow back to the downspout once the barrel is full, for added convenience.



MULCH

Adding mulch to your garden beds is one of the easiest things you can do to reduce weeds, watering and time required for maintenance. A 2" – 3" layer will also help to stabilize the soil temperature in the early spring and through the hot summer months. There are decorative benefits as well, with wood mulches and gravels available in various colours and textures. Shredded mulches will also help to break down clay as they decompose.

You can also use the leaves from your yard on garden beds, if the leaves are free of fungus and are of a variety that can break down within one season.

You may also shred your newspapers rather than putting them in the recycling bin. They can be spread on your garden (or put in your composter). It is important to use current newspapers, as they use non-toxic black ink. Avoid the colour sections of the paper (or contact the newspaper company to ensure they are safe).

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