



Ecological Gardens Newsletter

Winter 2004

<http://www.ecologicalgardens.com/>

“Landscape recovers the dynamic connection between place and those who dwell there”
Anne Whiston Spirn.

Spring is close enough at hand to begin designing and planning for this year’s growing season. Before beginning this year’s design take time to consider your backyard landscape aesthetic. Every backyard reflects how nature meets culture in that particular place.

Do you invite nature into your backyard? Do you gather food from your backyard? Are there ways that you can increase its beauty and bounty? Listed below are elements of an ecological aesthetic that may help provide a guide as you begin designing.

An Ecological Aesthetic

- ❖ Reflects the “special identity” of a place and works with the rhythm of the seasons, changing over time
- ❖ Brings nature back into the garden making it a place of use and movement
- ❖ Is enhanced and enriched by the human cultures living in an area
- ❖ Reflects the natural world in all its cycles – birth, growth, and decay become part of the backyard landscape
- ❖ Touches all the senses – bringing a variety of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures into the backyard
- ❖ Supports abundance with its many layers and niches

Design Tips for Solving Common Problems

Healthy soil is living soil and healthy soil is key to growing healthy plants. Before converting a lawn area or an area of bare soil to a perennial garden, soil repair may be needed.

Lawn soils are often compacted due to traffic and mowing. They are also low in biological life and high in phosphorus due to the use of synthetic fertilizers.

Bare soils tend to be low in organic matter and high in alkalinity due to the lack of groundcover.

If you don't know the condition of your soil, the first step is to get a soil test. The University of Minnesota will test soil samples for \$12. For information on how to take a sample, contact the University of Minnesota Soil Testing Lab at (612.625.3101). If you know your soil needs improvement the following is recommended:

- ❖ To increase organic matter, use compost. Compost also helps reintroduce the soil biological life. Peat moss can be added to balance alkaline soils.
- ❖ Cover the soil with mulch to maintain soil moisture. Mulch can be added as woodchips or perennial groundcovers that create a living mulch (vinca, stonecrop, etc).
- ❖ To reduce soil compaction, aerate the soil before planting.

Multifunctional Plants - Chives

Plants perform many important ecological functions in the landscape as well as provide beauty, medicine, and food for humans and wildlife. Chives is a good example of a plant that has many functions and uses.

Chives is an easy plant to grow. The tender shoots are edible and high in calcium and vitamins A and C.

Chives has a long history of medicinal use. It improves kidney function and has been used to treat kidney and bladder weaknesses.

Chives is a good pest repellent. It has been found to deter Japanese beetles. A spray of chives is believed to cure apple scab and mildew on gooseberries.

Chives is good at building soil and minimizing erosion since it is a long-lived perennial with fibrous roots.

Chives is a good plant for attracting beneficial insects.

Chives is a good companion plant with parsley, tomato, beets, carrot, apples and roses.

Plant Communities - Guilds

We have been working on a plant database for the Upper Midwest that contains information on plant characteristics, ecological functions, human uses,

compatibilities/incompatibilities, and concerns (toxicity and invasiveness). This information will allow us to begin putting plants together into communities - called guilds - to increase abundance, reduce water use, eliminate chemicals, and solve landscape problems.

We have designed plant communities to increase the sustainability of residential landscapes - *Sugar Maple guild, Red Oak guild, Black Walnut guild, and White Spruce guild.*

Plant communities that reduce environmental problems – *Erosion Control in Sandy Soils and Partial Shade guild, Riparian Buffer guild and Compaction in Heavy Clay Soils guild.*

Plant communities that create diverse agricultural cropping systems - *Apple Orchard guild, Hazelnut guild, and Greenhouse Pest Management guild.*

Plant communities that provide a diversity of food and habitat for wildlife - *Pheasant guild and Quail guild.*

We could use your help in designing more plant communities.

Are there problems in your landscape that you would like to have a plant community designed for?

Are there assets in your landscape - particular trees, water features, etc - that you would like to have a plant community designed for?

Send any suggestions or ideas to: paula@ecologicalgardens.com

Enjoy the rest of the winter!!

For information on upcoming events:

http://www.ecologicalgardens.com/upcoming_events.cfm

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