

What Is a Sustainable Landscape Anyway?

Mother Nature's Moment - December 2020
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Thirty years ago when our sons were in grade school they had a classmate that had to flee, with his mom, out west to a place above tree line in order to not suffer horrendous neurological symptoms due to the abundant use of toxic herbicides and pesticides in our suburban landscapes. This was not a very *sustainable* situation.

Sustainable is one of those terms that sounds good, but is often fuzzy around the edges as to what it means. It seems that everyone has a different idea how it applies to their situation. When it comes to our landscapes there are some fairly defined parameters around what it means, including but not limited to:

- *Creating and enhancing wildlife habitat in urban environments*
- *Minimal use of fertilizers and pesticides*
- *Use of green waste on site*
- *Conservation of energy, like fossil fuels*
- *Preservation of resources, like water, soil*



Monarch Butterfly on Milkweed plant in our front yard



Future tree trimmer aloft in a Hackberry tree.

Wikipedia defines a sustainable landscape this way:

“A sustainable garden is designed to be both attractive and in balance with the local climate and environment and it should require minimal resource inputs. ...design must be ‘functional, cost-efficient, visually pleasing, environmentally friendly and maintainable’. ... being careful to preserve limited resources, reduce waste, and prevent air, water and soil pollution...mulched areas”

In other words, *or in our words*, sustainable landscapes are those that are **tree friendly and people friendly**. A number of years ago we were invited to have our home landscape evaluated as part of the **Conservation@Home** program to see if it met their criteria for a property that was “sustainable”. It was kind of a slam dunk for us

because we don't use pesticides on the property. We have many native trees and a restored prairie area that is the most exciting part of our garden, as it is home to thousands of birds, mammals and insects every year. Lest you think our landscape looks unattractive, we also were serendipitously chosen by a Better Homes and Gardens publication for a feature 8 page article about our gardens. Sustainable could and should mean the landscape is an inviting place for plant, animal and human alike.



Our prairie garden in late summer, alive with pollinators and unplanned floral displays

The **Conservation@Home** program was developed by a consortium of concerned conservation groups in Lake County, IL like *OpenLands* and *Conserve Lake County* who recognized that the majority of open lands in the county were privately held. They realized that if they were going to make a difference in preserving these special places they needed to encourage landowners (like me and you) to make their properties places that were both tree friendly and people friendly = sustainable. It just really requires intentionality to have a landscape that invites native pollinators, migrating birds, and

human beings into a space that is safe and habitable for all.

Check out the Conservation@Home website for how you can join this really life giving program (<https://www.openlands.org/livability/lands-in-harmony/certify-your-property/>). Remember that little changes can make a big difference:

- Installing a "prairie pocket" of native plants to provide nesting, resting, and foraging habitat for our native pollinators.
- Creating a rain garden to preserve water and eliminate run-off and provide habitat.
- Insuring that NO pesticides are used on your property or at least reduced to spot treatments for critical areas.
- Next time you plant a new tree or replace one that was lost, plant a native tree that supports wildlife of all kinds.
- Remembering every day that what is good for our landscapes should be good for all of us, all the time.

Thirty years ago when we met our son's friend, Ryan, we determined to never be a contributor to his or other's ill health. We became a **green** company before it was popular, and when green meant just the *color of Kermit the frog*. Executing plant health care with a passion for making our corner of the earth safe for all of us has been our driver for a long time, and it is what motivates us to use thoughtful non-toxic solutions for all of your properties too.