

a voice  
for the natural  
landscaping  
movement



Reprinted from the  
*Wild Ones Journal*,  
Sept/Oct 2009 issue.

For more information, or to join  
Wild Ones Natural Landscapers,  
here's how to reach us:

**Phone**

(920) 730-3986  
(877) 394-3954 (Toll-Free)

**Mail**

PO Box 1274  
Appleton, WI 54912-1274

**E-Mail**

ExecDirector@wildones.org

**WebSite**

www.wildones.org

Celebrating natives  
plant and natural  
landscapes  
since 1979.

## Turf Wars Escalate

Mutiny is taking place in backyards across America, and more than one manicured lawn is being asked to walk the plank. Participants in this insurrection aren't some radical anti-turf revolutionaries. They're your average law-abiding home owners who are realizing the benefits of natural landscapes and the joys that come with gardening for wildlife.

These backyard naturalists are rejecting the 50's approach of sterile and monocultural gardening because they understand their natural landscapes contribute positively to the overall quality of the environment by improving air, water, and soil quality throughout the community while providing much-needed wildlife habitat. Habitat restoration is critical for wildlife in urban and suburban settings where commercial and residential development has eliminated most natural areas.

The positive aspects of natural landscaping for both the individual property owner and the community far outweigh the occasional negative perceptions of those addicted to the traditional lawn. With the help of the National Wildlife Federation, habitat enthusiasts have learned how to make their landscapes more hospitable to wildlife, while building a haven for escaping the stresses of everyday life. Time spent surrounded by a more natural landscape gets people closer to nature and in touch with her real beauty. Children especially love secret spots in the garden where they can hide, think, get away from big people, and learn about the natural world in their own way, at their own pace.

These new gardens are nurtured by individuals who want to invite the natural world back into their lives; to see butterflies dance from flower to flower, frogs splash across a water garden, turtles sunbathe on rocks and to hear the trill of songbirds fill the air. It's a way to connect with the natural world. And while occasionally an unwanted critter may venture in, the vast majority of wildlife species that are attracted to these refuges are welcomed.

By establishing a more natural landscape environmentally conscious gardeners are endorsing the use of plants native to the soils and climate of an area. These plants provide the best overall food sources for wildlife, while requiring less fertilizer, less water, and less effort in controlling pests. Over time this translates to less cost to maintain a garden. Americans spend \$27 billion a year on lawn care., 10 times more than we spend on school textbooks. The average lawn requires 9000 gallons of water per week, and 5-10 pounds of fertilizer per year, more than the entire country of India uses for its food crops. With natural landscaping many of these costs are weeded out. Best of all, these landscapes demand less routine maintenance so people can spend more





*Continued from page 1*

time enjoying and feeling connected to the wonders of nature. Simply stated, natural landscaping is designed to work with, rather than against nature.

Natural landscapes also provide people with a sense of place that distinguishes where they live from the rest of the world. Why for example, should a yard in Las Vegas look like one in New Orleans or Portland?

Ken Druse, author of *The Natural Habitat Garden*, says that "if even a fraction of America's 38 million gardeners turned a quarter of their landscape into a wild garden (only one tenth of an acre each) there would be a measurable impact...a tremendously positive gain for America's, and the world's, ecology."

Many people find their efforts to create a habitat not only rewarding, but fun for the whole family and an inspiration to their neighbors. In fact, there are several communities where many residents have gone native and had their backyards certified.

It's not just homeowners who are jumping on this band wagon. Several large corporations are also recognizing the benefits of natural landscaping, especially toward the bottom line. CIGNA is implementing several naturalistic cost-saving landscaping practices at its nearly 600 sites across the country. At CIGNA headquarters in Connecticut, the number of grounds maintenance crew has been cut in half and their annual landscaping budget has been reduced by \$400,000. Conservation Design Forum, a Chicago based firm, estimates that a mature native landscape can result in an annual maintenance cost saving of \$4,000 per acre compared

with a traditional turf landscape. That's good business in addition to the community goodwill companies can gain from demonstrating a commitment to environmental stewardship.

Laws that prosecute natural gardeners, commonly called weed laws, are gradually being overturned as the benefits of these green oases are being acknowledged. Even the federal government has taken a supporting stand. In 1994 President Clinton recognized the natural landscaping movement by issuing an Executive Memorandum that not only recommended natural landscaping at all federal facilities and federally funded projects, but presented guidelines for doing so. The use of native plants around the Vice Presidential mansion is one example of how the government is implementing this new mandate.

Lorrie Otto, a Milwaukee natural landscaping activist who has been referred to as the "high priestess" of the natural landscape movement, makes the argument for natural landscapes best when she says "If suburbia were landscaped with meadows, prairies, thickets, or forests, or combinations of these, then the water would sparkle, fish would be good to eat again, birds would sing and human spirits would soar."

Educating people about how they can make a personal contribution to conservation efforts and instilling a passion in them to make a difference is key to the long-term health of our environment. Creating natural landscapes in your own backyard is often the first step people take toward a life long commitment to global environmental stewardship.

Craig Tufts  
Chief Naturalist, [National Wildlife Federation](http://www.nationalwildlifefederation.org)  
Honorary Director, Wild Ones -- Natural Landscapers, Ltd.