

Redefining Beauty in Home Gardens

What makes a beautiful garden, lawn or landscape? This question has become more than an aesthetic exercise. With pesticides and herbicides threatening our health, droughts affecting our water supply, and climate change altering our environment, gardens must provide much more than beauty. They must improve our environment by filtering water, providing habitat for native fauna, and absorbing greenhouse gases.

Many of us in Lincoln have learned that meeting these challenges has led to a new idea of what is beautiful. Instead of sculpted shrubs and monoculture lawns swept free of leaves, we find we appreciate a more 'natural' look. This look incorporates native plants that are hardy without chemical amendments, leaf litter that tucks shrubs in for the winter, mossy outcrops in shady areas, the colors and shapes of perennials that come back year after year, even lawns that become tan during dry spells but spring back to life when rain returns.

There are many resources available for home gardeners who would like to follow sustainable gardening practices. A first stop might be the Conservation News section of the Lincoln Garden Club web site (www.LincolnGardenClub.org/Conservation) which features articles written by experienced Lincoln gardeners, and resource lists of books, local landscape contractors, and websites. The New England Wildflower Society (www.NewEnglandWild.org) is another source of valuable information about sustainable practices. If you really want to be a sustainable gardener, then local nurseries and garden supply houses that feature native plants will be more helpful than places that exist to sell chemical fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides.

A new source of information for home gardeners is Landscape for Life (www.landscapeforlife.org) which is based on The Sustainable Sites Initiative (SITES). Like the LEED certification for new buildings, SITES certifies landscapes that meet specific environmental standards. SITES creates guidelines and performance benchmarks for sustainable landscape design, construction, and maintenance practices. This new certification encourages elements such as permeable pavements and reflective surfacing to contribute to improved storm water management and reduction of heat island effect. Native plantings and rain gardens reduce the need for water, fertilizer, and chemical treatments.

While many of us are do-it-yourself gardeners, we often employ landscape contractors to carry out jobs that seem too big or time consuming for us to handle on our own. We have learned that many local contractors are happy to accommodate our requests for more sustainable approaches to lawn and garden care. It is worth finding out about these contractors whose interests are in accord with yours.

The Garden Club is using its management of Station Park as an opportunity for all to learn more about sustainable gardening, landscaping, and lawn care. We are dedicated to chemical and pesticide-free gardening, native plants, water conservation, sustainable lawn care, and composting.

We at Station Park and the Lincoln Garden Club invite you to join us in the effort to make our yards and public spaces safe for ourselves, our children, and our pets. We strive to find practical solutions for the problems we face in creating the healthiest environment possible and in keeping Lincoln beautiful. Please look for our programs that are open to the public, join the Garden Club, and come down to Station Park on a workday and help out. We'd love to see you there.

The Lincoln Garden Club promotes sustainable gardening and members have written a series of articles designed to demystify the process of developing sustainable gardening practices. Look for these articles in [The Lincoln Journal](#), in the Conservation News section of the Garden Club website (www.LincolnGardenClub.org), and in the Sustainable Landscaping section of the Greening Lincoln website (www.GreeningLincoln.org.)

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