

Redefining the Landscape: Modern Gardens Offer Beauty and Benefit the Environment

By Lynne Smith

Gone are the days of the superficial landscape. Modern gardens must provide much more than aesthetic value. Gardens also must improve our environment by filtering water, providing habitat for native fauna, and absorbing greenhouse gases.

Mark Richardson, the Horticulture Director of the New England Wildflower Society, gave a talk on "Redefining the American Landscape" on November 4th at Bemis Hall. The Lincoln Garden Club and Greening Lincoln co-sponsored the lecture which was open to the public and attended by about 60 people.

Richardson focused on the new directions for public, private, and commercial gardeners. Like the LEED certification for new buildings, The Sustainable Sites Initiative (SITES) certifies landscapes that meet specific environmental standards.

Formal gardens and elaborate greenhouses, like those at Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania, are beautiful to visit but they are 'water and energy hogs', according to Richardson. He contrasted Longwood with the Swarthmore College campus which has many conservation elements. Swarthmore's new building project earned gold LEED certification and the landscaping earned SITES awards.

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. Vegetation on "green roofs" reduce run-off and lower heat and cooling costs.

For home gardeners, Landscape for Life, based on the SITES principles, fosters eco-friendly landscape practices for small gardens as well as large private and public projects. The areas of focus include:

Hydrology - Design a site to capture and use rainwater optimally

Soils - Preserve or restore healthy soil to maximize water retention and healthy plants

Vegetation - Use native plants; Remove invasive plants as much as possible; Position plantings to reduce heat islands and maximize storm water management

Materials - Reduce, reuse, and recycle; Use certified woods and purchase local materials; Consider human health and environmental impact when selecting materials

Human health and well being - Provide spaces for mental restoration, social interaction, and physical activity

For further information on these initiatives and on the New England Wildflower Society, visit these web sites: www.sustainablesites.org; www.landscapeforlife.org; www.newenglandwild.org.

Published in The Lincoln Journal on November 21, 2014

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

Photo Captions:

Longwood Gardens (Longwood.jpeg) are beautiful to visit but Swarthmore College gardens (Swarthmore.jpeg) are sustainable as well as beautiful.