

Subject: [Fwd: Urban lawn a black hole for biodiversity]
From: Brian Platts <bplatts@shaw.ca>
Date: Sat, 08 Apr 2006 13:59:57 -0700
To: Corrie@kost.ca

Subject: Urban lawn a black hole for biodiversity
From: M E Craver <mecraver@shaw.ca>
Date: Sat, 08 Apr 2006 11:10:30 -0700
To: "FONVCA (E-mail)" <fonvca@fonvca.org>

Dear Corrie:

Our continuation of the dialogue on pesticides--

Perhaps it is a generational thing. The younger generation will be the ones to make big changes in our pesticide laws (less, or none, is better) as we move in the direction of organically produced goods and rip out the boring grass lawns. The young woman who wrote the following article makes a good point between the generational mindsets when it comes to lawns.

This year I will watch my lawn grow full of clover, dandelions and it's native relative (whose name eludes me). I will watch a couple patches of wild daisies, spreading buttercups, and a cluster of wild yarrow bloom on my lawn between the grass and moss. I will enjoy the birds, bees and butterflies that flock to this colorful lawn. Oh, and don't forget the wild violets! If the lot gets looking too unruly, I take a mulcher mower to it. "Lawn care" is simple for us. Perhaps someday we may just rip out our grass lawn, also, and "go native".

--Monica Craver--

The urban lawn a black hole for biodiversity

Megan Dickinson
Special to the Sun

Saturday, April 08, 2006

My mother loves her lawn. She keeps it immaculately trimmed, waging constant war with the dandelions.

She feeds, waters and limes it. She chemically treats and aerates it.

I love my mother, but I hate her lawn. This has been an issue between us for as long as I can remember.

I have told her about the negative impacts that fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides have on children's and pets' health, as well as water, soil and air quality. I have encouraged her to use the available alternatives, such as natural fertilizers and weed treatments.

She doesn't think that her small bottle of chemicals is a real problem, not recognizing that they add up to a lot

of toxic chemicals in and around our homes.

We are exposed to these yard chemicals outdoors, in our neighbourhoods and schoolyards. Pesticides and herbicides are also tracked into homes, where they can remain for years.

Children spend much of their time close to the ground, where they come into contact with, and are affected by, yard chemicals. Their brains and bodies are still developing, so this exposure can have devastating effects on their health.

My mom will hear none of it. She likes her lawn green and weed-free, oblivious to the consequences.

A number of Canadian municipalities have implemented bylaws banning the use of certain yard chemicals within city limits. My mom's municipality, on Vancouver Island, has implemented no such bylaw, and her lawn's substance-abuse problem continues to spiral out of control.

She installed a sprinkler system last year, so her lawn will be watered and green all summer long. The system is programmed so the lawn waters itself whether it needs it or not. This waste of water drives me crazy, since lawns do just fine if left dormant during the summer.

Not only is my mom's lawn a waste of water and full of chemicals, it is also a waste of space. I recommend that she get rid of her lawn, not by paving it over, or by dumping a truckload of gravel on it, as my Vancouver landlord did.

No, I propose that she use her yard for tangible benefit. In a move reminiscent of the "victory gardens" of the Second World War, she could plant vegetables, taking her community one step closer to food security.

What about planting the front yard as a raspberry patch, or a patch of clover, or in wildflowers? There are low-lying, grass-like, ground-covering plants that are durable and can be walked and played on. Most lawn alternatives require little maintenance, chemicals or watering. They encourage beneficial bees, butterflies and birds, improving the neighbourhood's biodiversity.

Less mowing and trimming reduces noise and air pollution. Who wouldn't love to be woken up Sunday mornings by birds rather than the neighbour's lawnmower? Eliminating the need for lawnmowing would also save teenagers from the torture of having to cut their parents' lawns.

My east Vancouver neighbours are doing some creative and inspiring things with their yards. Some garden with native plants, creating wild and beautiful displays. Others have flawless, colourful gardens surrounding small patches of grass.

Each yard is different and reflects the resident's personality and style. This is not the case in my mom's neighbourhood, where every yard looks the same, differing only in the length of grass and number of dandelions.

Lawns are a bizarre cultural phenomenon, a black hole for biodiversity. My mom generally is an ecologically aware person, but her lawn is kept immaculate to "keep up appearances" for her neighbours. We need to redefine what a culturally acceptable yard looks like, away from the fashion of manicured, chemically treated lawns.

I dream of buying a house, digging up the lawn and landscaping the yard with native, drought-resistant plants, a vegetable garden and a shaded sitting area. I will spend many a happy afternoon getting my hands grubby in the dirt, as I rip out every last bit of turf.

I will replace the grass with plants that supply an ever-changing mosaic of colours and textures. I dream of

bringing life into my yard, inviting back the birds and the insects that should be such an integral part of our landscape.

--*Megan Dickinson is a student in the semester in dialogue program at Simon Fraser University*--

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