



View of Sustainability:

Designing Rural Landscapes



Written & photographed
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Far from being daunting, creating gardens for a rural property is an artistic opportunity. The first steps are to relax and have fun, realizing how lucky you are. Next, make a list of assets and challenges. Do you have a pond or flowing water that can be made into a one-of-a-kind feature? Even existing swales where rain water flows through your property can be made to look like a stream.

What features would you love to have? Many gardeners want a vegetable plot or a collection of fruit trees and shrubs. Put them in a sunny area. A pool needs to be sited carefully for best light and proximity to the house. Keep in mind the location of underground features, such as a septic bed, where you'll have to avoid digging, large trees, structures and use of vehicles. Conversely, large trees near the south-west and south-east corners of the house are great for cooling in the summer.

Think about having a patio touching the house at the same

▲ A gazebo offers a destination in the landscape and if screened, can be a haven from mosquitoes. Have fragrant plants nearby so the scents waft over you.

level as the inside floor to make it more inviting, and a second patio further off, to pull activity away from the house. Consider permeable interlocking stones to let rain flow into the soil. A patio can raise the value of a home by 12 per cent!

Frame the View

“Borrow” views from other properties, such as a picturesque barn or distant hill by framing them with large evergreens or structures or even a trick gate, which looks like a gate but doesn't actually open. This creates the illusion that your property extends farther.

Destinations are important in large properties. It's a common mistake to tuck things close to the house. Having somewhere to “go” in the garden makes it feel more welcoming. A bench surrounded by fragrant plants gives a great place to sit between mowing and weeding. Make sure that your rest zone is very low maintenance, with lots of

easy-to-care-for groundcovers. You don't want to be thinking about work when you relax.

Do large gardens have to be high maintenance? There are lots of tricks that keep things looking good throughout the year. Creating a wildflower meadow brings in butterflies and much more, and supports biodiversity while reducing mowing. Supporting birds and pollinators help keeps pests down. Surround a gazebo with drifts of low, native shrubs, such as grey-twig dogwood, with a path mowed though the meadow leading to it.

Think Big!

A wonderful thing to have in a large garden is a sculpture. It doesn't have to be expensive. It could be an antique farm implement or a fine piece by an important artist. Envelope it with bold landscaping such as a large drift of switchgrass. Make sure it's visible from a window so you can enjoy it even in winter.

Think BIG! Picture a grove of birch trees under-planted with groundcovers, not just one tree with a couple of perennials under it. Use large drifts of plants, numbered in the tens. Large drifts are necessary to get visual impact. They also make maintenance simpler. A long way from the house, the plantings should be large scale and simple with just a few types of plants, other than in the case of a meadow which should be diverse. Closer to the house, there can be a larger variety of plants with more detail.

Resist the temptation to use invasive plants to fill space quickly. Invasives are non-native varieties which spread aggressively at the expense of our natives. Such species as Crimson King Norway Maple, Periwinkle, Goutweed and English Ivy can overwhelm plants that you love in the countryside, such as Trilliums and Sugar Maples.

Work with what you have! Plant a dry hillside with drought-tolerant varieties like grasses and coneflowers. If you have a low, wet area, use species such as red-twig dogwood, sparkleberry, blue flag iris and cardinal flowers. Having wet areas as rain gardens is also important for recharging ground water and protecting our creeks.

Since we're in Canada and for six months of the year it's dark when we leave for and return from work, we don't get to enjoy our landscapes as much as we should. Low-voltage LED lighting is incredibly efficient and long-lasting. Properly placed, it can hide deficiencies in the garden and highlight strengths.

Don't get stressed about things. Critters nibble and weeds grow but a beautifully designed landscape, properly scaled to the property, adds value and enjoyment to life. **NEV**

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