The Importance of Bayscaping on Long Island

PECONIC BAYKEEPER
Drink. Swim. Fish.
Pesticides 101: Get The Facts!

⇒ More than 1 billion pounds of pesticides are used in the United States annually.

⇒ 127 million pounds of those pesticides are applied annually by homeowners for use on their lawns and gardens.

⇒ Homeowners use about 2-3 times the amount of pesticides on their lawns as compared to the amount used on one acre of agricultural land.

⇒ Over 100 pesticides have been found in Long Island's drinking water aquifer.

⇒ About 50% of one's lifetime pesticide exposure occurs in the first 5 years of their life.

⇒ Common landscape pesticides have been linked to autism, Parkinson's disease, brain cancer, Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, and erectile dysfunction.

Statistics courtesy of Perfect Earth Project.

Bayscaping in Action

How to Bayscape at Home:

Individuals can bayscape their properties and enhance habitat value while also benefiting local water quality.

- Reduce lawn area — Lawns are species-poor, monoculture areas that facilitate runoff and provide no protection against the elements.

- Leave the leaves — Leaving fallen leaves and other biomass on the ground reintroduces essential plant nutrients to the land, acting as natural fertilizer during decomposition.

- Start a compost — By composting organic kitchen and yard waste, homeowners will create nutrient-rich soil to use in their gardens and yards.

- Plant natives — Planting vegetation that is native or well-adapted to your area will help restore the natural landscape, maintain native species diversity, and lessen maintenance inputs. Some examples of Long Island's native plants include: Bayberry, New England aster, Purple lovegrass, and Black cherry.

- Eliminate fertilizers, pesticides, & herbicides — Eliminating the use of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides on your property will reduce excess nutrient loads into nearby water while simultaneously providing a safer and healthier yard for kids and pets.

- Reduce watering — Homeowners should irrigate using infrequent, deep watering (4-6in down) techniques to encourage deep plant roots, stabilize yards, capture nitrogen, and reduce runoff.

- Create natural buffers — Planting natural vegetation will provide properties with natural buffers against storm surges, floods, high winds, and other weather events.

- Lessen impervious surfaces — Incorporating porous surfaces into landscapes will help protect against floods and runoff.

- Incorporate rain gardens — Plant native plants with deep, stabilizing roots in shallow depressions underneath yard areas that accumulate particularly large quantities of runoff, such as gutters.

"Where one person sees beautiful wildflowers, another might see unkempt weeds."
— EPA
Conversations with Bayscapers

Edwina von Gal, Perfect Earth Project:

Edwina von Gal is a toxin-free landscape designer who founded the non-profit organization Perfect Earth Project in 2013 to promote toxin-free landscapes around the world.

Conversation with Edwina:

Q: How did you get interested in this?
A: Well, it never made sense to me to put chemicals on my food and on my self. Then I talked to my landscaping clients about not using chemicals on their properties and they were all on board. I started gardening in about 1970, then I started my landscaping business in 1984, and I founded Perfect Earth Project in 2013.

Q: How has this landscape impacted your quality of life?
A: It is my sanity. Not everyone is born to be a gardener, but I do believe that everyone responds positively to nature.

Q: Do you think that this is something everyone can do regardless of, say, income level or geographic location?
A: Sure! All you need is a piece of land!

Q: What is your favorite part of your toxin-free yard?
A: It’s super easy. It’s full of surprises – every year it changes and every year it moves. By relinquishing control, you’re allowing nature to design your landscape. We lay out the framework and let nature take control.

Q: As a bayscaper who lets her yard grow in naturally, how is your yard affected by the elements?
A: During Superstorm Sandy’s tremendous tides, the high tide bushes at the edge of the salt marsh that borders my property caught lots of stuff, they buffered the impact of the tide coming into my meadow. Following the storm, none of the plants showed any change after the salt inundation.

Q: How do you think that encouraging toxin-free, responsible bayscaping techniques will help to protect Long Island’s unique water resources now and in the future?
A: There are two parts to this. The first part is obvious, it’s the direct result that fewer toxins will enter the system. The second part is that encouraging people to landscape responsibly will engage them in an environmental act and make them realize that this is something that they can do. Even though this is a secondary benefit, I would argue it’s just as important as the first part.
Advice & Suggestions from Bayscapers

- Mow high and sharp, never cut more than 1/3 of the blade of grass.
- Don’t spray your property for ticks. Use repellents instead. Host-specific controls against ticks are recommended over broadcast sprays.
- Be mindful of your irrigation methods. 30-70% of water, depending on the season, is used for irrigation.
- Don’t start irrigating your yard until the weather gets dry in early summer.
- Replicate nature by not irrigating too often because weeds love water.
- When you do water, water deeply as if mimicking a full day of rain. Soil should be moist to about 4-6 inches deep to encourage deep roots – using a moisture meter can help measure this. In general, when your yard is dry, water for 1-2 hours 1-2 times per week in each zone. This recommendation can vary based on weather, soil composition, and geographic location.
- Infrequent, deep watering will discourage abundant mosquito populations, whereas frequent, shallow watering creates a haven for mosquito breeding in your yard.
- Don’t remove biomass from your yard because it helps to restore nutrients to the soil. Dead trees are especially valuable as they are favorable perching grounds for many bird species.
- Be cautious about plants that are termed “New England natives,” and pay attention to specifically Long Island genotypes when selecting natives for your property.
- Welcome the native wildlife, they have unexpected benefits! For example, ticks are attracted to opossums, and opossums eat 95% of the ticks on their bodies.
- We all need to create demand for native plants by asking local garden centers to carry more natives and organics. Current local sources include the Long Island Native Plant Initiative and Warren’s Nursery. Landscapers can help by asking wholesale growers to grow more natives.