

Living Green

TORONTO STAR

SECTION U

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NO MORE LAWN TO CUT!

Jane Hayes replaced her front lawn with more useful and eco-friendly greenery, U5



GOING WASTE-FREE

The 99% solution

Brooklin family reuses, recycles or composts nearly all its household waste

STEPHEN LEAHY
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

On Aug. 10, Shawn Williamson put out his family's first bag of trash in 26 months. That's right, 26 months and just one bag of trash for Williamson, his wife, Monica, and their 7-year-old daughter Alyssa.

The Brooklin family recycles, reuses or composts 99.3 per cent of



If we all do our part, the impact could be big

Politicians, businesses must take more action

PETER GORRIE
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Conserve energy. Use less water. Eliminate waste. Reduce gasoline consumption.

These are all ways we can cut our carbon emissions and reduce pollution. There are plenty of opportunities to live "greener."

If each of us did what we can, it would add up to a big impact. I wouldn't, however, be big enough to solve climate change and the rest

Eco-gardener follows natural route

PAUL GALLANT
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

When Jane Hayes and her family moved into their home in the Roseville neighbourhood, she knew immediately she'd be saying goodbye to its Kentucky bluegrass lawn.

Five years on, the grass has been replaced by garden beds with a wide variety of greenery that is not only more useful — both for eating and medicinal purposes — but also much more eco-friendly than grass.

"We're trying to follow nature's patterns," says Hayes, whose business, Garden Jane, offers education and consultation on all things green. "And it certainly looks better than the lawn."

Although any ground cover is more eco-friendly than asphalt or concrete, Torontonians are increasingly creating gardens that require less water, fewer fertilizers and pesticides, and generally have smaller carbon footprints than conventional patches.

Hayes calls her approach "permaculture" — doing things in ways that are more resilient and more likely to work with the environment than against it. The more extreme version of green gardening is referred to as xeriscaping, where a landscape is specially designed to minimize or eliminate the need for watering and other resources.

The first step of greener gardening is choosing plants based on where they're going, rather than a garden that catches your eye in a nursery centre. Often, that means choosing native species over exotics, since the former fits better into the southern Ontario ecosystem, feeding and giving shelter to native insects and birds, which will, in turn, do much of the work in helping the plants flourish.

"Five years ago, you'd be hard-pressed to find native species in garden centres," says Cynthia Brown, Healthy Yards program co-ordinator for the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. "Now, they're much easier to find."

Native plants need less water and fertilizer to thrive



Jane Hayes and daughter Chloe Godbout, 18 months, in the front yard of their Roseville home. MICK DEGAIR FOR THE TORONTO STAR

For example, black-eyed Susana has become popular, while ground-suck, an invasive species that tends to take over everywhere it's planted, has fallen out of fashion. Native woodland plants such as ferns, wild columbine and Solomon's Seal have also been catching on.

Figuring out what to put where is equally important.

When Marjorie Mason Hogue bought her Uxbridge property in 1998, she soon discovered that its

large slope was almost as dry and sandy as a dune. So she planted native trees and shrubs and, since then, has never watered, fertilized or taken much care of the plot, aside from occasional weeding.

"The only problem is that the shrubs are growing so big, we don't have room for annuals anymore," says Mason Hogue, who runs Mason House Gardens with her son Jeff.

Not content to have a zero-main-

tenance plot, Mason Hogue has made sure her greenery strategy also cuts her household energy consumption. She's planted deciduous trees to the southwest of her home to cool the place in the summer, reducing AC expenses, and coniferous trees to the northeast, to reduce cold winds that drive up heating costs in the winter.

When native plants are matched with the soil and light conditions they prefer, they often don't need to

be watered at all. Sometimes it takes a few small adjustments. Rain gardens, for example, use depressions in the landscape to capture downpour water, channeling it primarily to the thirstiest plants, while those with drier tastes are planted farther away from the depressions.

"A lot of the problems that happen with plants are because somebody's trying to grow something that doesn't want to be where it is," says Helen Mills, who's worked as a consultant with Green Gardeners. "If you create a healthy ecosystem with lots of predatory insects, they'll eat your bad guys for you."

When watering, it's better to water slowly, deeply and early in the day, says Mills, which reduces evaporation and deepens roots.

The other secret weapon against thirsty plants is mulch. It retains moisture in the ground, reducing the need for water and chemical fertilizers. Mulch can include grass clippings, leaves and compost from household garbage.

When Toronto's green bias was introduced, many people who used to compost stopped doing so, using green bins instead. But diverting organic waste from the green bins will reduce greenhouse gas emissions from trucks and provide nutrients closer to home. This time of year, Brown says many people are tempted to clean up their gardens, stuffing organic material into bags.

"Don't do that. The piles of leaves, the dying flowers, they're a source of food for the birds and they've a great start for ground cover," she says.

For Hayes, who has a 17-month-old baby at home, the fact that eco-friendly gardens are also much easier to care for is an added bonus.

"Each plant that you choose should do at least two jobs in your garden ecosystem, whether it covers the soil, pollinates, is edible, medicinal or is attractive to you. Once you've made good decisions in the beginning, it gets so much easier."