



GARDEN SMART

Can anything be more satisfying than a fertile carpet of green grass? How about a healthy landscape that features less lawn and beautiful plantings—all grown without the excessive use of pesticides, fertilizers, and water!

The Problem

In some cases, invasive nonnative plants have displaced native plants, thereby degrading the integrity and diversity of our native plant communities. We've all witnessed the spread of purple loosestrife in our wetlands, where it has established large colonies and displaced native plants. Other invasive nonnative plants in Maine include multiflora rose, common and glossy buckthorns, shrubby honeysuckles, Asiatic bittersweet, Japanese knotweed, and Japanese barberry.

Dumping yard waste or plant materials can create blockages to natural or man-made waterways. Excess vegetation can trap sediments and block the streambed, causing flooding. Dumped yard waste spreads invasive species, which can pose a threat to existing native vegetation and reduce the diversity of natural systems. Decomposing vegetation and excess nutrients reduce the oxygen available in streams for fish and aquatic life.

The Solution

There are many ways to garden smarter. Here are just a few.

Landscape with native plants where possible.

Nearly 1500 species of native plants are part of what makes Maine a unique place. Native plants—also called indigenous plants—are those that either originated here, or arrived without human intervention. Native plants form the historical basis of our landscape, provide food and habitat for animals, and serve as natural sources of food, fiber, and other products. You can bring these beauties into your yard for a garden that attracts wildlife, needs less watering, weeding and care, and best of all, requires virtually no herbicides or pesticides.

Did you know?

You can encourage beneficial insects by planting flowers that provide nectar and pollen.

Native plants have extensive root systems that cut down watering needs, help infiltrate water back into the ground, minimize soil erosion, filter pollutants from runoff before leaving your property, and provide vital habitat for native species. Landscaping with native plants is economical because they are adapted to local soil and climate conditions and once established will require less watering and fertilizing. Native plants also naturally resist pests and diseases, eliminating the need for harmful pesticides. Plant a diversity of native plant species for optimum wildlife habitat.

For a complete list of Maine native plants, go to www.umext.maine.edu/onlinepubs/htmpubs/2500.htm. For a list of Maine nurseries and garden centers offering native plants, see http://www.umext.maine.edu/onlinepubs/htmpubs/2502.htm#Maine_Nurseries or <http://www.yardscaping.org/sources.htm>

For more information about Maine native plants, see Bulletin #2502, "Native Plants: A Maine Source List" at <http://www.umext.maine.edu/onlinepubs/htmpubs/2502.htm>.

Additional tips when choosing plants for your garden:

- Incorporating a diversity of plants into your landscape will naturally inhibit disease and pests, and greatly improves habitat for wildlife. Try using a variety of native plant species—they attract beneficial insects that will keep away pests.
- Make watering efficient by grouping plants with similar watering needs and using drip irrigation.

- Take time and get to know your landscape/garden before making decisions about changes.
- Choose plants appropriate for the soil/sun conditions in your yard and choose pest resistant varieties.

Keep trash, debris, fall leaves, and lawn clippings away from ditches, streams, and the water's edge.

Collect or mulch leaves soon after they fall to ensure that they don't get carried into lakes and streams through storm drains or by getting blown directly into the water. Leaves add excess nutrients and use up valuable oxygen in the water as they decompose. Rather than spend the extra time and energy raking leaves into compost bags or to the street for curbside pickup, mulch the leaves into your lawn—it's free fertilizer and adds organic matter to the soil!

Compost

Composting yard refuse turns leaves and grass clippings into rich organic fertilizer and mulch. Not only is this an environmentally sound thing to do, but it will provide you with an ongoing supply of free, high quality, soil-enhancing material for the garden.

Tips on Composting

- Locate your bin in a semi-shaded area of the garden. The material in the bin will get hot as it decomposes, but after the hot stage you want earthworms to colonise the compost. A bin in the sun may always be too hot for earthworms.
- Use a variety of materials such as food scraps, crushed eggshells, lawn clippings, leaves, soft prunings, animal manure, seaweed.
- Don't put weeds with seed heads and invasive plants that strike easily from stem tissue in the bin or heap.
- Chop up everything as small as you can. Run the mower over leaves and put prunings through a mulcher or chop them. This greatly increases the rate of decomposition.
- Keep the mixture moist - too wet and there will not be enough air, too dry and decomposition will slow down dramatically.
- Get air into the mixture by turning it over regularly.
- Don't include meat and fats in your composting materials, and also avoid citrus skins and onions which earthworms hate.

Compost yard waste away from streams and the shoreline.

Properly site your compost piles away from the water's edge to eliminate the chance of runoff from these piles contributing excess nutrients to the water. Don't burn yard waste adjacent to waterways—the ash contains phosphorus which can degrade water quality.

For more information on composting visit <http://www.umext.maine.edu/onlinepubs/htmlpubs/1143.htm>. One "traditional" composter that seems to work well is the Bosmere (<http://www.amazon.com/Bosmere-Compost-11-Cubic-Capacity-K767/dp/B001D4OS0U>). For odor-free scrap collection, try the Gaiam compost bucket - <http://www.amazon.com/Gaiam-Kitchen-Compost-Bucket-Large/dp/B0009LD3Y0>. An "alternative" composter to consider is the Cone - <http://www.peoplepoweredmachines.com/greencone/>. These composters are odor-free and require no turning or air flow. You can purchase two – let the first fill up, then start filling the second and by the time the second is full the first has beautiful compost. Of course, you can also build your own compost bin – visit <http://www.edf.org/article.cfm?ContentID=2030> to learn more.



Spruce Creek Watershed Improvement Project

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