

Creating Landscape Diversity - A Homeowner's Guide

BayScapes are environmentally sound landscapes benefiting people, wildlife and Chesapeake Bay. BayScaping advocates a "holistic" approach through principles inspired by the relationships found in the natural world.



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What is the urban watershed?

The Chesapeake Bay watershed consists of a 64,000-square-mile drainage basin whose surface waters all flow into the Bay. We generally consider the forests, fields, farms and wetlands when describing this watershed, but rarely do we think to include the urban and metropolitan areas falling within its boundaries.

As in the larger Bay watershed, the urban watershed drains surrounding land surfaces. While metropolitan communities play an integral role in the health of Chesapeake Bay, we don't always make that connection as we go about our daily lives. Hundreds, even thousands, of local creeks and streams that feed into the Bay's rivers or tributaries are piped under ground, channeled above ground in concrete, directed into stormwater detention ponds, moved under cities through large culverts, or fed into deep underground sewers. Others

remain open and drain through community parks, large residential complexes and urban subdivisions. Local stream corridors provide essential wildlife habitat as well as much needed recreational and open space for people. Together, this network of natural and engineered waterways, along with the land drained by it, defines the urban watershed.

Land practices and landscape cover within the urban watershed play an important role in the health of the Bay. In the Chesapeake region, landscapes providing plant and wildlife diversity and pollution prevention are called BayScapes because of the beneficial impact they have on the Bay.

Landscaping and Gardening Without a Yard

City residents may be faced with a variety of landscape choices. If you are an apartment dweller, you might think of your landscape or garden as small or insignificant but, in fact, it provides tremendous relief from the artificial environment. The simple addition of a potted vine making its way up a wall, adding color and texture to the surface, can be dramatic. It does not require a lot of effort or expense to greatly improve a small-scale garden area and, in doing so, you are making your city more livable by adding to the visual aesthetics shared by all.<P> Small-scale urban landscaping may also be quite portable. Almost any species of plant will grow in a container and, as such, move when you move. And if your garden is containerized, you can substantially change its appearance with little effort or money. Container plants can be shuffled around, lowered or raised, or re-potted for a distinct, new look.<P> One unexpected benefit for urban gardeners is the heat island phenomenon, which actually extends the gardening season. In the spring, urban areas tend to warm up faster, while in the autumn, they hold their



summer heat a bit longer. Such local site conditions are often referred to as micro-climates, and the clever gardener can get a jump on the growing season and enjoy the outside landscape just a bit longer before winter arrives.

Aren't landscaping and gardening expensive?

No matter where you live, you can participate in many aspects of landscape gardening with a surprisingly modest budget. Balconies support a host of gardening options, from containerized trees and shrubs, to vines and bulbs in pots, to vegetable plants and herbs in tubs. Small water gardens and wall gardens also thrive in small spaces. As long as you provide adequate sunlight and regular watering, you can create a wonderful little garden for yourself as well as a friendly haven for wildlife friends. Think of your garden as a wildlife oasis that you created, providing another link in the restoration of lost or seriously fragmented wildlife habitat in the Bay region.

Container gardening is limited only by your imagination. These fanciful creations might include an entire patch of vegetables in containers-providing beans, peas, root crops, vine crops, fruit trees and grapes. This type of gardening allows you to garden year-round. Plants can come inside when cold weather arrives and move back out when the danger of frost has passed. The money you invest in plants and garden tools will be repaid many times over with fresh food for the dinner table.

Other inexpensive ideas to consider include hanging baskets mixed with hanging bird feeders, window boxes containing herbs for kitchen use right outside your window, plant stands that create a privacy wall, and shade

gardens nestled beneath an overhang of wooden lattice or a trellis. Such gardens add color to your apartment, as well as charm and distinctiveness that will be appreciated by passersby.

Wall gardens can be easily created by hanging plants, some wall figures, perhaps a trellis of vines, ground covers, or climbing vegetable plants and possibly a small water spout from any available bare wall. Requiring little space, wall gardens serve as privacy screens and, at the same time, provide a buffer from objectionable views and sounds. These vertical gardens are easy to organize and inexpensive to create. If done carefully, they appear to bring the outdoors into your apartment, and the effect can be quite cozy. Plants in a wall garden, however small, will help intercept and trap airborne pollutants and, through the process of transpiration, cool the air.

Alternatives for lawn areas

For some people, any size lawn is too much to maintain. Fortunately, there are many alternatives to consider.

Ground covers provide an alternative that offers a number of color and texture options in both evergreen and deciduous varieties, and work well in hard-to-reach areas in your landscape. Once established, they require very little maintenance and have great appeal to the weary gardener tired of mowing grass. These champions of the garden world keep the soil friable, or loose, ready to receive and percolate falling rain into the ground below. Seasonal bloom periods and interesting, vibrant fall colors result in an exciting and ever-changing landscape.

Many native ground covers thrive in shady areas in the landscape receiving

less than ideal light. In the Chesapeake Bay watershed, they are well-adapted to variable weather conditions and extremes. Under deciduous trees, in a woodland shade garden and even on the north or east side of a house, these hardy ground covers boast distinctive leaf shapes and naturally resist pests.

Vegetable gardens do more than replace lawn areas. They provide home-grown produce for the dinner table. Consider intensive vegetable gardening—a method of growing vegetables and flowers together in relatively small spaces.

In areas close to the house, consider replacing some lawn area with a water garden, which can consist of just about anything that introduces water into your landscape: ponds, fountains, barrels of water, a bird bath or even a waterlily tub. Splashing water can provide a much-needed respite on a hot day for songbirds who find the sounds and cool surface irresistible. A small wooden barrel or even a plastic tub can bring life to a colony of waterlilies, complete with small fish or maybe a frog or two. Once you see how water attracts wildlife, you may find yourself experimenting with several containers to create a veritable wildlife sanctuary right at home. Even a simple, shallow bird bath can entertain the apartment dweller with reflections and sounds previously unknown on a terrace or balcony.

Hedges are living fences that give you privacy without an artificial structure. Large shrubbery plantings also screen out objectional views and sounds. Songbirds find living fences and shrub beds enticing homes, and the early morning chorus will reward your efforts many times over.

Patios and decks provide another alternative for land previously in turf grass. These outdoor living rooms are fun and, surprisingly, not too difficult to construct or install. Wooden construction and brick-on-sand building techniques slow down surface runoff and increase on-site percolation. Given the emerging popularity of do-it-yourself deck and patio construction, there are a number of instruction guides available. Look for them in your local public library, at home

building retail centers and at most full-service nurseries and garden centers.

Some gardeners convert their lawn area to trees, replacing an open lawn with the vertical strength of a forest in the making. This option requires careful selection of appropriate trees but can be very rewarding over time, especially in terms of reduced maintenance.

Beyond my home, what other gardening opportunities exist?

Many options exist that can expand gardening activities beyond your residence. Many city dwellers find the open ground at a street tree's base a suitable small garden plot for shade-loving plants, ground covers and even bulbs. Street trees provide not only wonderful shade and cool resting spots, but also generous amounts of oxygen to help keep the air clean and clear. These tall sentinels help to visually break up the urban skyline and introduce a textural softening to streets and buildings. Trees unite people in a neighborhood by providing a sense of identity, especially when a given species is planted together to define a specific area, such as a boulevard. Be sure to get permission in writing from your local municipality before planting around street trees. Along with permission, most municipalities will advise you about proper care and maintenance of the tree and your plantings.

In some urban communities, innovative forestry programs offer training for local residents, teaching them how to care for street trees. Open and abandoned lots have been completely reforested in some instances. Such patches of forest, however small, provide critical sources of oxygen and habitat enclaves within an otherwise artificial environment.

Grass strips between the sidewalk and street provide a unique gardening

opportunity, assuming that local government regulations do not forbid such activity. Many a flower garden has found its way into these places, adding a splash of color to an otherwise dull street scene. Some municipalities have taken back portions of paved roads and reworked them for pedestrian use. A median strip in the middle of a broad avenue provides another source of color and texture when planted with trees, shrubs and flowers. These BayScapes add much to a city's personality.

Many urban areas in the Bay region have organized programs for local participation, such as community gardens. Generally, tracts of land currently not in use are made available for neighborhood projects such as vegetable gardens. Community gardens reward residents with free produce, healthy exercise, a sense of personal accomplishment and the beauty of a colorful garden where a vacant or abandoned lot once stood. Whether you participate as an individual gardening in an assigned plot or as part of a group project, community gardens bring people together while working toward a common goal.

Neighborhood pocket parks managed by community associations provide sanctuaries from the noise and chaos of the busy city. These wonderful corners offer shade trees, shrubbery beds, flowers and bulbs, as well as a place to sit and enjoy the cool, green scenery right in the heart of the city. Pocket parks may be connected to larger parks by a common creek or stream, forming greenways enjoyed by cyclists, joggers and birds and other wildlife. School and church yards provide yet another opportunity for community gardening to add even more green space to the urban setting.

Since most of the population growth in the Bay region is projected for metropolitan areas-particularly those within a two-hour drive of the Bay-keeping these communities livable and pleasant has become an increasingly difficult challenge. Adding to landscape diversity through BayScaping responds to this

challenge by:

- moderating temperatures with additional shade trees
- trapping airborne pollutants with vegetation
- restoring places for birds and animals to live
- increasing porous surfaces that absorb precipitation and reduce runoff from the land into local waterways

Collectively, these BayScape elements reinvigorate a city with natural beauty. BayScaping reminds us that we are connected by both land and water to the Bay.

Suggested reading list

Ray, Richard M., ed. *Container and Hanging Gardens*. San Francisco: Ortho Books, 1975.

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Taloumis, George, ed. *Container Gardening*. Handbook #85. Brooklyn: Brooklyn Botanic Garden, Inc., 1979.

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Howard, Frances. *Landscaping With Vines*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959.

Kramer, Jack. *Hanging Gardens*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971.

Pesch, Barara B., ed. *Plants and Gardens*. Brooklyn Botanic Garden Record: Water Gardening. Brooklyn: Brooklyn Botanic Garden, Inc., 1985.

Clark, David E., ed. *Basic Gardening Illustrated*. Menlo Park, CA: Lane Publishing Company, 1975.

Damrosch, Barbara. *The Garden Primer*. New York: Workman Publishing Company, Inc., 1988.

For More Information

For additional information on how to create diversity in the urban setting, contact your local or area Cooperative Extension office. The Cooperative Extension is a service of the land-grant university system in the District of Columbia, Maryland, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

BayScapes is an environmental education initiative developed by the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Chesapeake Bay Field Office.

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