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# Fall Landscaping: Seven Tips and Several Trends

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As the weather turns and stays cool, and the leaves turn, the fall offers a gentle invitation to look back and think ahead, while we attend to seasonal landscaping needs. Landscape philosophies and practices that were just ideas a short time ago are showing up in our neighborhoods and commercial developments.

Here are seven tips on the most current fall land care recommendations, followed by a look at all the ways that land care and landscape design are changing.

## **When caring for your lawn this fall, consider the following:**

- Re-think leaves: Fall leaves are integral to many critters' life cycles. Give your leaf-smarts a refresh by reading the Xerces Society article, "Leave the Leaves!" [xerces.org/2017/10/06/leave-the-leaves](http://xerces.org/2017/10/06/leave-the-leaves)
- Set the Thanksgiving table—bird-style: Leave flower stalks and ornamental grasses standing until March or later. Seed heads offer food for overwintering and returning birds.
- Care for pollinators: While "social" honeybees overwinter together in hives, about 90 percent of bee species are solitary. Their larvae overwinter in the soil or hollow stalks, such as those found in raspberry canes or sunflowers. If you do cut stalks, lay them horizontally on the ground until the spring. The larvae will emerge when temperatures are right, usually by late April or early May. [xerces.org/in-your-pollinator-garden-november-2013](http://xerces.org/in-your-pollinator-garden-november-2013).
- Kill some weeds, herbicide-free: Place cardboard over a weedy area and cover the cardboard with a thick layer of leaves or straw (four inches or more). Leave it in place for up to a year. Avoid glossy cardboard. Avoid hay, unless it is cooked hay. I have used this technique successfully on bittersweet, poison ivy, and other difficult-to-kill weeds. It is particularly useful in wooded areas and along edges.
- Free the trees: Move leaves and mulch away from tree trunks to avoid creating "mulch volcanoes," which pose multiple problems. Apply only two to four inches of mulch in a ring three to six inches away from the trunk.
- Nix the dyed mulch: The problem is not so much with the dye, but with the wood. Consider this statement on the UMass Extension website: "It has been found that some of the recycled waste wood used for making landscape mulch products is contaminated with various chemicals, such as creosote and CCA (chromated copper arsenate)." See the full article: [ag.umass.edu/landscape/factsheets/colored-bark-mulch](http://ag.umass.edu/landscape/factsheets/colored-bark-mulch).
- Turn down the volume: Electric leaf blowers, mowers, and weed whackers are much quieter and cleaner than gas-powered. Consider switching this year.

## **Here's a look at all the ways that land care and landscape design are changing.**

**Rainscaping** is visible everywhere. Raingardens, vegetated buffers, and bio-swales catch heavy downpours and melting snow on commercial and homeowner landscapes alike. The plants in these aqua-friendly landforms help manage and cleanse water as it infiltrates the soil. Rainscapes function best with plants adapted to periodic flooding and drought, such as those listed by UConn's online raingarden app: [nemo.uconn.edu/tools/app/raingarden.htm](http://nemo.uconn.edu/tools/app/raingarden.htm).

At this year's conference of the Ecological Landscape Alliance, "artful rainwater design" was a hot topic. See [artfulrainwaterdesign.psu.edu](http://artfulrainwaterdesign.psu.edu).

New **pervious and permeable pavements** are replacing hardscape roads, parking lots, driveways, and sidewalks these days. In East Haddam, homeowners Felicia Tencza and Randy Miller installed a permeable driveway system on their steep landscape. One of their goals was to prevent water flow into nearby Lake Hayward.

In Westbrook, the new town center parking lot uses pervious asphalt on the parking surface, and pervious stabilized stone dust on the pathways.

On the other hand, rain is sometimes absent for long stretches, of course. **Xeriscaping**, or designing for drought-tolerance, is gaining ground even in rainy New England. Professional landscape managers use more warm-season ornamental grasses, junipers of all sizes, sedums, and other "desert camels" of the plant world. They employ water-holding techniques such as the addition of organic matter to the soil and placing plants closer together to shade soil surfaces.

And need we mention the popularity of **pollinator gardens**?

Xeriscapes, raingardens, and pollinator plantings often have a less formal look than conventional gardens, an appearance that some call nature-scaping. Not everyone loves this look, and it has prompted discussions about blight enforcement in some communities, including New London.

But according to Katie Dubow, creative director at Garden Media Group in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, there's a growing acceptance of the look of "imperfect gardening."

"While the manicured front lawn is still a suburban norm," says Dubow, "we are seeing a shift in understanding that the lawn is not sustainable, that pollinators are necessary to our survival, and that when we turn a little bit of grass into a pollinator garden, our entire neighborhoods come alive."

Garden Media Group has tracked landscape trends for 17 years. Garden Media Group's 2018 report is online free-of-charge at [www.gardenmediagroup.com](http://www.gardenmediagroup.com).

As I mentioned above, when it comes to **turning down the volume**, the issue of noise pollution has become an increasingly important topic. Yale University recently announced the end of gas-powered blowers and mowers on university grounds in favor of quieter, cleaner, battery-powered electrics. Learn about Yale's new power equipment: [sustainability.yale.edu/news](http://sustainability.yale.edu/news).

And then there are the trends that take us to land we don't own directly, but can learn from and enjoy.

The practice of "**forest bathing**" evolved in Japan during the 1980s as Shinrin-yoku or "forest medicine." Only a few years ago, it was still considered a bit edgy.

In 2017, public interest in the topic led the Connecticut Forest and Park Association to host a three-month series. Learn about Connecticut Forest and Park Association's upcoming forest bathing sessions: [www.ctwoodlands.org](http://www.ctwoodlands.org).

According to Casey Sclar, director of the American Public Gardens Association, an estimated 121 million people come to their member gardens each year.

“That is almost as many who attend all major professional sports events,” he says. “Moreover, attendance at sporting events is flat or declining, while public garden attendance is growing by 5 to 10 percent each year.” (Sclar says sports attendance is about 134 million for the NFL, NBA, NHL, and MLB combined.)

Public gardens in our area include Marsh Botanical Garden, Yale University, 265 Mansfield Street, New Haven; Berkshire Botanical Garden, 5 West Stockbridge Road, Stockbridge, Massachusetts; Tower Hill Botanic Garden, 11 French Drive, Boylston, Massachusetts; and Blithewold Mansion, Gardens, and Arboretum, 101 Ferry Road, Bristol, Rhode Island.

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