Celebrating 10 years in clean energy & green building

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CARBON-CUTTING MADE EASY(er)

ARE HEAT PUMPS RIGHT FOR MY HOME?

NATURE-INSPIRED INTERIOR DESIGN



CONTRIBUTORS



Christy Crocker is the executive director of the Maine Indoor Air Quality Council, a nonprofit organization dedicated to creating healthy,

environmentally sustainable indoor environments through education, communications and advocacy.



June Donenfeld is a Midcoast Maine writer, editor and writing coach focusing on sustainability, design, education and social entrepreneurship.

In previous lives, she also worked in philanthropy and cross-cultural communication.



Dan Kolbert has been a contractor in the Portland area for over 20 years, specializing in energy-efficient homes. He is coauthor of *Pretty Good House*

(Taunton Press, 2022).



Steve Konstantino
is the founder
of Performance
Building Supply
in Portland. He
is dedicated to
helping builders
build better by
sharing technical

knowledge and sourcing highperformance European windows and doors, air-sealing/weather barrier tapes and membranes, cabinetry and more.



Kerry Lewis leads the Landscape Architecture team at Knickerbocker Group. She has been a registered landscape architect for 30 years, focusing on

ecological gardens for the Northeast.



Parlin Meyer is the director of BrightBuilt Home, a design firm in Portland that uses off-site construction manufacturers to build modified and custom versions of

its high-performance home designs.



Amy Paradysz is a contributer and editor at Green & Healthy Maine and a longtime Portland Press Herald columnist.



Raine Raynor is a contributor and editor at *Green* & *Healthy Maine*. Her other creative interests include graphic design, photography, and landscape

architecture. She lives in Portland.



Julia Bassett
Schwerin is
a National
Association of
Realtors-designated
Green Broker and
a member of the
Sustainability
Advisory Group

of the Greater Portland Board of Realtors. She teaches and consults on green building subjects throughout the United States.



EDITOR & PUBLISHER

Heather Chandler

COPY EDITING & PROOFREADING

Amy Paradysz Raine Raynor

ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE

Cheryl Denis

MARKETING & DESIGN SPECIALIST

Raine Raynor

DESIGN

PELLE Graphic Design

ADVISORY PANEL

A special thank you to the *Green* & *Healthy Maine Homes* advisory panel members.

Bill Bell / Maine Pellet Heating Association
Chris Briley / BRIBURN Architecture
Richard Burbank / Evergreen Home
Performance

Christy Crocker / Maine Indoor Air Quality Council

Anna Heath / Maine Passive House **Ashley Hopwood Farrar** / Meldrum

Design

Dan Kolbert / Kolbert Building **Steve Konstantino** / Performance Building Supply

Michael Maines / Maines Design
Emily Mottram / Mottram Architecture
Randy Rand / Tekton Fine Living
Meredith Randolph / Four Winds Design

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The ecological benefits of shrinking your lawn

A few sobering facts about lawns in the United States:



2% of U.S. land.



Gas-powered lawn



spend billions of dollars annually and use ten pesticides and fertilizers



nitrogen-based fertilizers run off and become a major source of water waterways and wildlife.



30-60% of urban to sustain lawns. irrigation water than any agricultural



biodiversity deserts

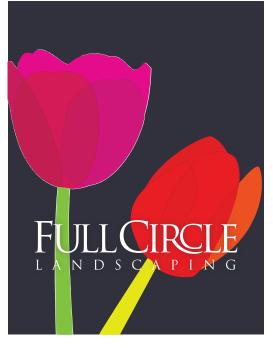
OW CAN THE AVERAGE HOMEOWNER make a difference? I recently sat down with Emily Baisden of Wild Seed Project in North Yarmouth to discuss accessible entry points into sustainable landscaping for the Maine homeowner. Our conversation focused specifically on the ecological benefits of reducing turf grass in home landscapes.

Some immediate easy remedies are available. First, ensure the turf is mowed to a minimum height of 3 inches. Taller turf encourages deeper root systems, which require less water and create a more robust condition that can outcompete aggressive weed species like crabgrass.

Next, consider both modest "evolutionary" and higher commitment "revolutionary" changes.



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EXAMPLES OF MODEST "EVOLUTIONARY" APPROACHES INCLUDE:

Investing in an electric mower rather than using gas.

Planning for more efficient watering, such as watering in the early morning when soil can absorb the most moisture before it evaporates in the hot sun later in the day.

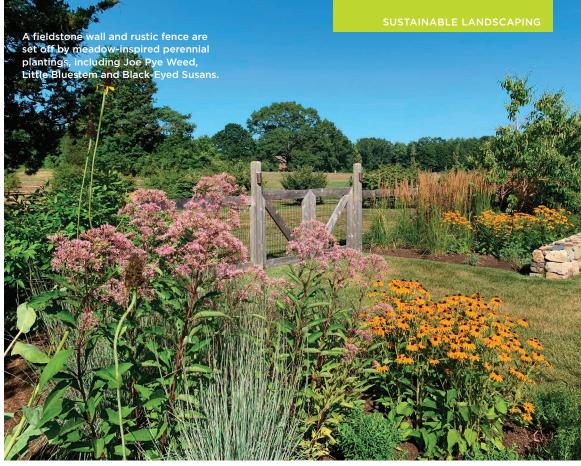
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Applying less fertilizer and pesticides at the appropriate time. For example, cool season grasses that are prevalent in New England turf lawns should be fertilized when the lawn is actively growing, between late March through early Mary and between late September and early November.

If you want to go all in with a "revolutionary" approach, consider the following suggestions:

CHANGE THE TYPE OF TURF TO MORE DROUGHT-TOLERANT SPECIES, interplanting the turf with clover, violets or creepers like thyme, or consider removing sections of turf altogether and replacing it with native plants. You might automatically think of creating a meadow in place of a traditional turf lawn. However, Maine is not historically a meadow-supporting climate, and a meadow can take up to seven years to become self-sustaining. Meadows also require active maintenance: I have just over one





acre of meadow on my property and need to regularly cull out the aggressive players, like Canada Goldenrod, which could turn my meadow into a monoculture if left untended.

A more accessible approach is to **PLANT SHRUBS IN SMALLER SECTIONS OF ELIMINATED TURF**. Baisden recommends an easy method of digging up the sod and turning it over, dirt-side up, and then using those sections of turf as a mulch around the root zone of newly planted native shrubs, such as highbush blueberry, red or black chokeberry or winterberry holly in moister areas.

EDGE HABITATS MADE UP OF SHRUBS AND UNDERSTORY LAYERS hold significant value for birds and wildlife and are progressively disappearing due to the development of new residential lots. Lawns stretch up to the forest edge with no intermediate mid-layer connection. **PRESERVING ALL THREE LAYERS OF A NATIVE LANDSCAPE**—canopy, understory and ground layer—is essential for sustaining a healthy habitat. Perhaps start your lawn removal at this junction of lawn and tree canopy, inserting native shrubs and groundcovers to recreate that critical understory layer.

Consider **EXPLORING PLANT GUILDS**, which can guide you toward the recreation of a plant "community" where plants thrive together in shared conditions. Wild Seed Project (**wildseedproject.net**) has excellent publications available for native trees, shrubs and groundcovers that are invaluable educational tools. Additionally, explore the National Wildlife Federation website (**nwf.org**) for resources on what species are local to your area.

Once you start seeing the increase in bird, butterfly and caterpillar activity in these edge habitats, I guarantee you'll be ripping more turf out in the seasons to come. G&HM

