



# What Is Sustainable Landscaping?

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Staghorn Gardening

ClimateConversationsRI, March 2025



What does it mean to have a sustainable landscape?



How can you best support the conservation of resources and increase pollinator habitat all while maintaining the recreational use of your yard in a changing environment?



This lecture will discuss basic Sustainable Landscape concepts that can be applied and adapted to residential properties to mitigate flooding and drought and support biodiverse habitats in our community. By looking at four drivers of , we will focus on the system of sustainable landscapes.

# Sustainable Landscaping



■ Ecosystems ■ Community ■ Maintenance ■ Behavior

# System of Native plant options

Natives

Nativar

Cultivar

Non-native ornamental

“Bully’s”

Invasives





















Staghorn Gardening Client, 2023



Suzannah MacDonald, 2024

#### PLANT

#### ATTRACTS

Aster	→	
Bee balm	→	  
Coneflower	→	  
Coreopsis	→	 
Whirling butterfly bush	→	 
Oakleaf hydrangea	→	 
Button bush	→	  

Missouri Cooperative Extension, n.d.)



# Invasive Plants; replace when it makes sense

► Stop Light



Privet

► Green Light

Bayberry



American holly, Inkberry



Rhododendrons, Mtn. Laurel

# Resilient Plants

## Drought

- ▶ Coneflower
- ▶ Yarrow
- ▶ Amsonia
- ▶ Rosemary
- ▶ Sedums & Stonecrops
- ▶ Ostrich Fern
- ▶ Barren wort

## Flooding

- ▶ Red or yellow twig dogwood
- ▶ Geum
- ▶ Carex, Sedges, Rushes
- ▶ Ninebark
- ▶ Lobelia
- ▶ Lillies
- ▶ Camassia
- ▶ Columbine

# Sustainable Landscaping



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# Community Engagement

Generational knowledge

Local economy, spending  
power

Neighborhood patchwork  
vs. linear boundaries

Talk with your neighbors!



## RI Native Plant Guide

This interactive, searchable database of plants native to Rhode Island was developed in 2016 and revised in 2024 and is meant to help landscape professionals and backyard gardeners familiarize themselves with flora endemic to our local ecosystem.

### How to Use the Guide:

Use the dropdown menus and checkboxes to select for plants native to Rhode Island that meet the conditions on your site.

See the [Glossary](#) for descriptions of sortable site and plant characteristics.

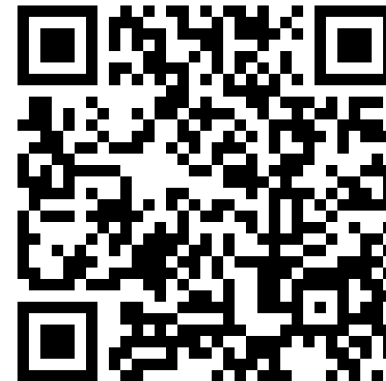
Click "Clear filters" to do a new search.

For photographs and more information about each plant, we recommend visiting the [Native Plant Trust's Go Botany site](#).

### Glossary :

Full Sun	(FS)
Shade Tolerant	(ST)
Drought Tolerant	(DT)
Wind Tolerant	(WT)
Height	(H)
Width	(W)
Coastal Zone 1	(CZ1)
Coastal Zone 2	(CZ2)
Bird Habitat	(BH)
Pollinator Habitat	(PH)
Edible	(E)
Medicinal	(M)

<https://web.uri.edu/rinativeplants/>



*“Join us and plant native to rebuild the ecosystems that support all life, and restore the vital connections between plants and animals for a healthier, thriving planet.”*

- Doug Tallamy  
Co-founder, HNP



## JOIN THE MOVEMENT - HERE'S HOW

### 1 Plant Native

Plants and seeds from our partners, no experience necessary!

<https://homegrownnationalpark.org/>



# Local Superstars

Independent & Local

Local Plant System

Responsible Neighborhood  
Sourcing



# Sustainable Landscaping



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# Maintenance

Redefine maintenance!

Hold off on Spring 'clean-ups'

Opt for closed-loop products

Ask professionals for sustainable options

Just say no to lawn fertilizers

Leave the leaves

Save the Stems



Vertical fence posts hold collected branches, logs, and leaves to create a physical soft-scape.



# Active Stormwater Run-off collection

- ▶ Conserves home use
- ▶ Supports initial non-edible plantings
- ▶ Visual aid in SW infrastructure
- ▶ Minimizes washout



Suzannah MacDonald, 2025



# Passive Stormwater Run-off Collection

- ▶ Targets water flow
- ▶ Low-maintenance plantings
- ▶ Amplifies water and nutrient cycle



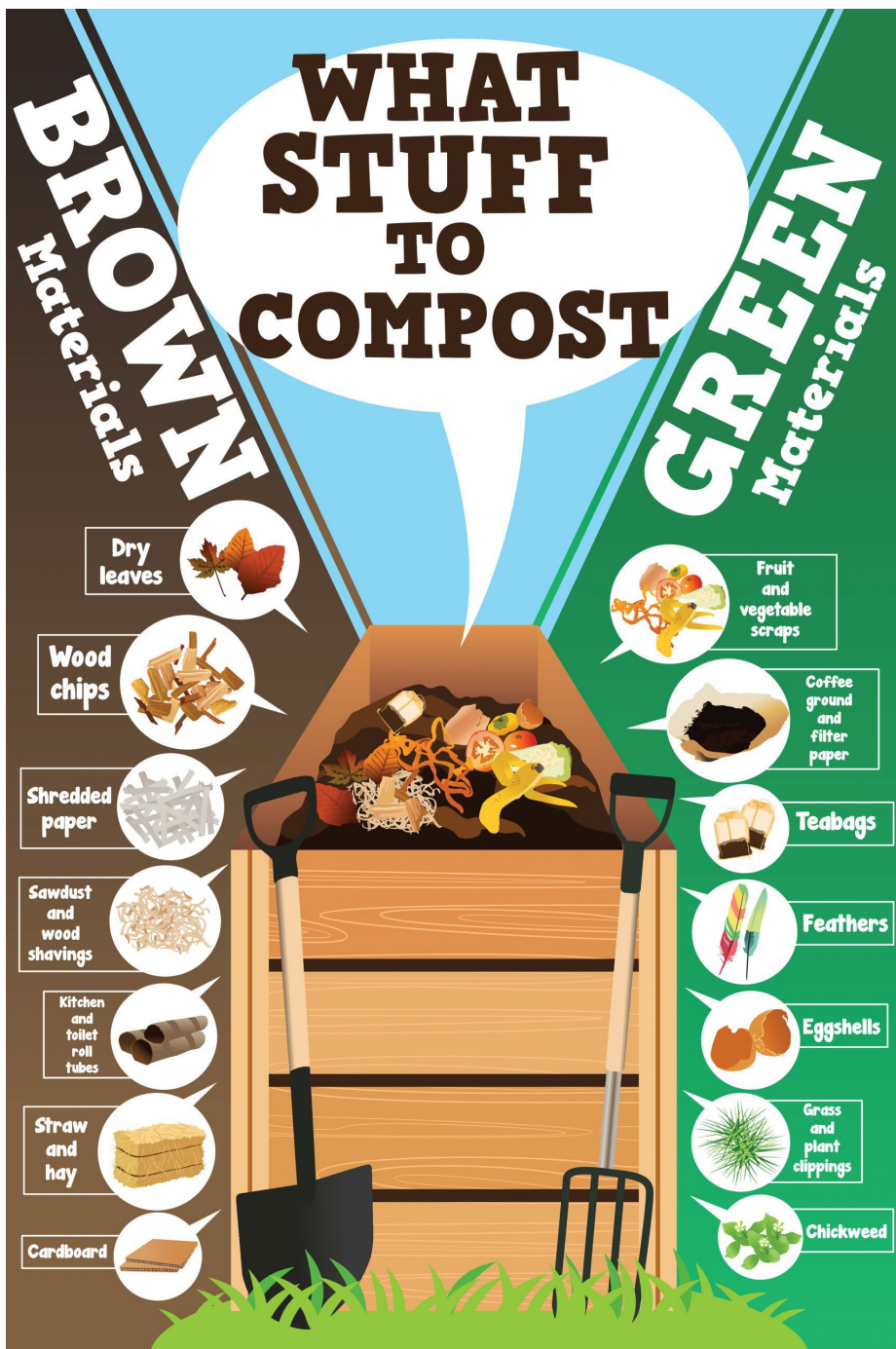
Suzannah MacDonald, 2023

# Sustainable Landscaping



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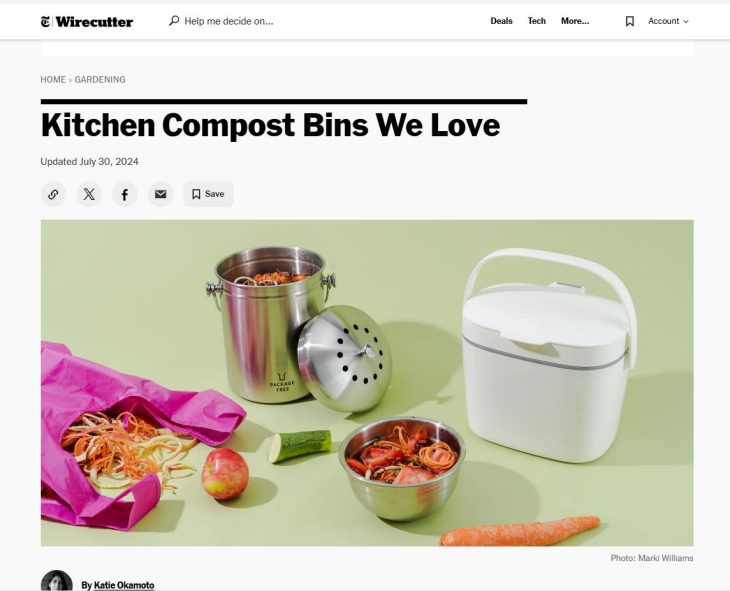
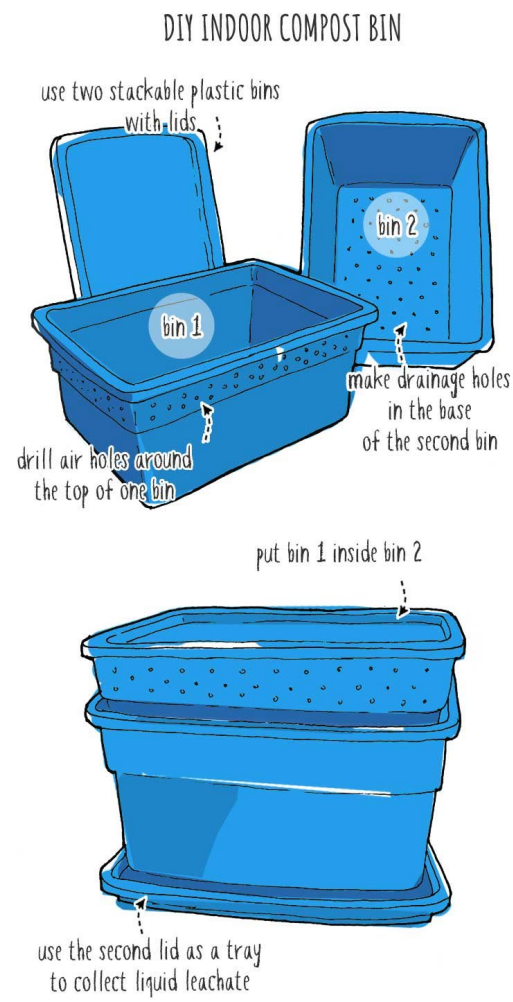


# Compost:

## *The Earned Free Stuff!*

- ▶ Active Use
- ▶ How to start?
  - ▶ “Save the scraps”
  - ▶ Full sun & accessible
- ▶ Sources
  - ▶ Mixed brown and green material
  - ▶ Do not add invasive weeds
- ▶ Greenwashing in Compost
  - ▶ Avoid biodegradable plastic products

# Compost Bin Infrastructure





# Behavior Shifts

## *Collaboration instead of controlling*

- Leverage points of change; small action with big impact
- Keystone Plants
- Just say no to (gas) leaf blowers!
- Use motion sensor outdoor lights
- Create soft landing spots for insects
- Reduce or minimize synthetic fertilizers.
- Biodiversity > Monoculture
- Ecoregions > growing zones
- No Mow May = short-term gains
- “Mulch” when necessary, not every year

# Observe

- ▶ Step away from controlling
- ▶ Four seasons- enjoy them!
- ▶ Looking for different perspectives
  - ▶ Leaves hold an eco-system
  - ▶ Deadheads on flowers provide bird food



Suzannah MacDonald, 2018



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# Case Study: Arcadia, Exeter, RI







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Summer 2024

January 2025



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# Sustainable Landscaping Workshop

10 am - 12 pm  
Saturday, June 7, 2025

To register, please speak with  
Meg Kerr, [megkerr66@gmail.com](mailto:megkerr66@gmail.com)



# Local Resources

- ▶ ReSeedingRI, <https://riwps.org/reseeding-ri/>
- ▶ RI Wild Plant Society, <https://riwps.org/>
- ▶ RIISC, [Invasive-and-Weedy-Plants-in-RI-2020\\_-FINAL.pdf](#)
- ▶ RIRRC compost [Get Compost | RIRRC](#)
- ▶ ClimateConversations, <https://www.climateconversationsri.com/>

# National Resources

- ▶ Homegrown National Park, <https://homegrownnationalpark.org/>
- ▶ New Directions of the American Landscapes, <https://www.ndal.org/>
- ▶ WildOnes, [wildones.org](http://wildones.org)
- ▶ Prairie Up, <https://prairieup.com/>



# Podcasts

- ▶ A Way to Garden with Margaret Roach
- ▶ Plantrama
- ▶ The Joe Gardener Show
- ▶ Two Minutes in the Garden
- ▶ In Defense of Plants
- ▶ Growing Greener
- ▶ Cultivating Place

# Books



Public list of available sustainable landscaping books through the Rhode Island Libraries interlibrary loan program.



# Thank you!

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