



How green does your garden grow?

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Environmental gardening not always easy

When someone refers to your “green thumb” it’s meant as a compliment to your skill as a gardener. But what are the chances that having a “green” thumb will some day mean a compliment to your environmentally conscious way of gardening?

According to garden designer Caitlin Black, it’s not necessarily as easy as it sounds. Black and her husband Owen design, install and maintain gardens for their clients in a sustainable way through their eco-friendly company, Aloe Designs. Black says sometimes when she suggests ways that clients can “go green” in the planning of their garden, they look confused.

“They think they are already going green just by planting a garden. The average gardener isn’t savvy about ways they can lessen the impact on the environment.”

Although most garden centres carry a line of “green” alternatives, Black says what is available is limited – and so is information.

“Consumers aren’t being educated within the stores. It’s up to the individual to seek out green solutions for themselves,” she says.

Green rule number one when planning a garden of any size, says Black,

is to determine what kind of irrigation system is appropriate for your garden and your lifestyle. Installing an efficient underground irrigation system in a larger garden, or connecting lines to the bottom of pots on a patio or balcony “gives plants water on an ‘as needed’ basis and eliminates the need for costly and wasteful overhead watering.”

Black says having a system installed needn’t be expensive, but the cost will vary depending on the number of “zones” that need watering. She adds: “You can always pick up a system and install it yourself.”

Using a 100 per cent organic soil amender when it’s time to fertilize is a natural alternative to the standard “synthetic” fertilizers. Synthetics take a lot of energy to manufacture.

“The plants get way more nutrients than they need, plus the synthetic elements leach into the water table and upset the ecosystem. It’s comparable to using antibiotics when a more holistic approach would have been gentler on your system and just as effective,” Black adds.

In addition to giving your plants a great natural nutrient boost, a soil amender offers the added benefits of aiding moisture control and providing a

temporary weed barrier.

One of the questions Black routinely asks her design clients is, “Do you cook a lot?” If they do, she offers up “edibles” as a beautiful, yet functional alternative to planting flowering annuals. Instead of spending hundreds of dollars on annuals that are going to be thrown out in the fall, growing vegetables or herbs provides fresh, organic produce for your table.

“A lot of people are amazed that it’s even possible to grow an herb garden on their balcony,” she says.

Another eco-friendly option Black recommends for changing things up in your garden is to consider using a variety of perennials (such as sedge, Mexican feather grass, phormiums or euphorbia) as a base, then filling in the holes with flowering annuals.

“Aside from reducing your out-of-pocket expense, you are saving the tremendous amount of energy that would have been required to grow those annuals in greenhouses,” she explains.

“Making some ‘green’ changes may seem daunting at first, but before you know it, going green will become second nature.”

For more green gardening tips, visit www.aloedesigns.com.



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