

THE GREEN CONDO PAGE

This is hopefully going to be a recurring feature in our quarterly newsletter, with wide ranging topics all related to the environment. Whether it improves the sustainability of your condo operations, reduces waste, increases energy efficiency, reduces water consumption or just beautifies the environment surrounding your property, we'd like to hear from you - just send us an email with a subject line of "CCI Green Condo Page". We hope to hear from you soon.

NATURAL LANDSCAPING

Modern urban life in the Canadian prairie is a recent development. The earliest records of significant modern urban development in or near Winnipeg began in the 1830s. While indigenous peoples have occupied the land for thousands of years with little or no environmental impact, everyday urban activities impact on the environment is recent and significant.

With the development of dense urban living, condominiums have flourished. Within Manitoba, there are hundreds of condominium corporations (CC). Some CC's are just a few units, and others can be well over 100. Many of them have in common green areas set aside for the sole use of unit owners. These areas can be relatively small, while others can be much larger. Many green common sites are at ground level, while others might be on a balcony or rooftop patio.

What can we do with our green spaces to improve our common area living space while enhancing the environment around us. Sometimes the plants in those spaces might be natural to our prairie environment, but many times they are not. When we choose by design or default to use non-native plants, the impact can be significant but often not immediately apparent.

For example, the condominium corporation I live in has three large areas solely or primarily covered with lawns. With the addition of all the common outdoor spaces, there is nearly 7,500 square feet of space that could be converted from lawns, sidewalk borders or bare ground covered with mulch or stones into native plants.

Many gardeners have seen the virtues of native plants filling those spaces now occupied by lawn and non-native plants. A form of ecology gaining a foothold is Reconciliation Ecology, a field of study pioneered by Professor Michael Rosenzweig of the Ecology and Evolutionary Biology Department of the University of Arizona. An excellent introduction to reconciliation ecology is a in podcast with Professor Rosenzweig¹.

A simple explanation of reconciliation ecology by Professor Rosenzweig states,

"reconciliation ecology is the science of inventing, establishing and maintaining new habitats to conserve species diversity in places where people live, work and play."

According to Professor Rosenzweig our urban areas are here to stay, so we need to learn to fill those spaces with native plants that support the local environment.

What are we to do with the space we have available to us and adopt a new view of native plants. I sought the insights of local expert and master gardener Kelly Leask. Kelly owns and operates Prairie Originals located near Selkirk, Manitoba.² Kelly purchased Prairie Originals in 2020 after working there for several years.

I spoke with Kelly about her passion for wildflowers and native grasses and listened to her interview on The Grow Guide Podcast Episode 26 from April of 2018³. In the interview, which I highly recommend, Kelly



Prairie Crocus

Black-Eyed Susans

Milkweed

talks with Dave Hanson of Sage Garden Greenhouses and Maggie Wysocki, creator of Soil to Soul, about suburban lawns, native grasses and wildflowers.⁴

Kelly points out that Manitoba is one of the most badly damaged ecosystems on earth. There is less than 1/20 of 1% of the original tallgrass prairie left in Manitoba. Kelly pulled no punches; modern lawns are ecological nightmares. Current concepts of urban lawns date back to 17 and 18th century England and France. A large manicured lawn was a clear signal to neighbours of your wealth and social status. Only a wealthy landowner could afford large pieces of land with a mono-culture that produced no food and did not pasture livestock.

A further informative examination of the modern lawn is on the Podcast Freakonomics Radio (episode 289) "How Stupid Is Our Obsession With lawns" broadcast initially in May of 2018.⁵ According to the narrator Steven Dubner, Americans spend sixty billion dollars a year to maintain lawns. The water necessary to maintain American lawns is estimated to be 20 trillion gallons of water a year. In comparison, American agriculture uses 30 trillion gallons to irrigate all American crops. Added to the unnecessary water needs are fertilizers, insecticides, herbicides and repeated cuttings, without which that green lawn space might not look quite so desirable.

If this has got you interested in changing the landscaping at your property, Kelly recommends considering these three Manitoba native plants - Prairie Crocus, Black-eyed Susans and Milkweed.

All three are native to Manitoba, and Milkweeds in particular are special in that they are the primary food source for Monarch Butterflies and the only plant Monarchs lay eggs on.

"Bringing Home Nature" is Kelly's guide book for Native Plants.⁶ The book's author, Professor Douglas Tallamy of the University of Delaware, writes,

"To have butterflies, we need to make butterflies. Butterflies used to reproduce on native plants. Before, the plants were bulldozed and replaced with lawns. To have butterflies in our future, we need to replace those lost host plants. No, if's and's, or but's. If we do not, butterfly populations will continue to decline. No butterfly garden should do without milkweeds."

Manitoba native plants not only thrive here, but they support a host of native insect, bird and animal life. Kelly's website lists hundreds of pollinators interactions, all necessary for a healthy environment that her native plants support, that that lovely looking mono-culture lawn will never be able to match.

Time to get gardening, naturally.

DUANE ROHNE
Director, CCI Manitoba

Additional Sources: Manitoba Master Gardener Association
<https://www.mgmanitoba.com>

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RESILIENCY PLANNING - FOLLOW UP

The recent extreme weather events, due to disruptions of the polar vortex⁷, with resulting extended power outages in Texas, brought back memories about our Thanksgiving snowstorm⁸ in 2019. So this seems like a good time to follow up on our prior article on *Resiliency Planning*⁹. Coincidentally, Manitoba's Climate Action Team (CAT) recently released their *Road to Resiliency (R2R)* report¹⁰. The report lists the following essential objectives:

1. **Food:** Feed ourselves locally without fossil fuel fertilizers or diesel for machinery;
2. **Shelter:** Heat all of our buildings (old and new) affordably without natural gas;
3. **Transportation:** Move all goods and people without gasoline or diesel
4. **Electricity:** Develop and use our electricity resource effectively, efficiently, and affordably to meet those other three objectives

Translating these objectives into the context of condominium living, consider the following:

1. **Food:** Does your condo have garden plots available to unit owners? If so, does your condo have a composting program (<https://greenactioncentre.ca/composting/>) to reinvigorate your soil? If garden plots are not an option, how about rooftop gardens? Have you ever thought about partnering with a market gardener to get fresh produce for your unit owners? If you are interested, the Green Action Centre¹¹ has some options for you, including gate-to-plate offerings from some farmers and subscription-based community supported agriculture?
2. **Shelter:** How are your units and common elements heated and cooled? As part of your long term planning in conjunction with your reserve fund study, have you considered geothermal as an option for heating and cooling? Here is an article from CBC *What on Earth* article about condos and geothermal <https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/what-on-earth-condos-geothermal-canada-jays-climate-change-1.5910570>. Ever thought about doing an energy audit (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Energy_audit) or a Deep Energy Retrofit (DER) project (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deep_energy_retrofit). An example of a DER project applicable to the condo market is now underway in Edmonton - <https://sundancecoop.org/sundance-retrofit-project/>. Are you aware of passive heating and cooling techniques¹² to reduce the heating and cooling load (shade trees, blinds, awnings, solar walls, etc)?
3. **Transportation:** Is your condo in an area served by transit services (<https://winnipegtransit.com/en/navigo>), ride-share services (Uber, Lyft, Taxis, Limos, etc) or car-share services (<https://www.pegcitycarcoop.ca>) that would reduce the need for personal transportation usage? Do you have plans to incorporate electric vehicle charging stations on your property? Do you provide safe and secure bicycle parking facilities, such as those at the University of Manitoba (<https://umanitoba.ca/sustainability/1117.html>), or at Red River College (<https://www.rrc.ca/parking/bike/bike-lockers/>) or at one of the Rapid Transit Stations?
4. **Electricity:** As part of your long term planning in conjunction with your reserve fund study, have you considered adding green energy production via wind or solar to achieve net zero energy usage on an annualized basis? Have you transitioned away from incandescent lighting to LED lighting? Are your appliances EnergyStar certified? Efficiency Manitoba has

numerous rebates and offers (<https://efficiencymb.ca/offers/save-more/>). Have you considered upgrades to insulation and your building envelope (air tightness) to reduce your heating and cooling load?

Lots to think about as we near the end of the season in which we fear losing power and freezing, and are about to enter the season with a chance of flooding and periods of extreme heat. How resilient is your condo? How resilient is your family?

GROW YOUR OWN SOIL

Now that you've started thinking about growing your own food and improving your landscaping, consider one of the key components to enable your success - the soil itself. Do you want to spend money on artificial fertilizers, purchasing bags of topsoil and peat moss, or instead get all of the benefits for free? Consider setting up your own ON SITE community composting system¹³. As a free service offering from the Green Action Centre, they provide the bins and aerator for you, they put on a composting workshop for you and your neighbours, and provide startup information materials and ongoing support.

ON SITE is looking for multi-family buildings

- located in Winnipeg that have a minimum of 4 units
- with a minimum of two volunteers to coordinate on behalf of your building
- sufficient residents who have expressed interest in composting
- and manager/owner/board who are supportive of this project
- With adequate space to place bins outdoors on your property (approximately 3'x3'x9')

If your condo is interested in setting up your own ON SITE composting program, just email compost@greenactioncentre.ca or call 204-925-3777 ext 108 to let them know you're interested. 🌱

1 Professor Michael Rosenzweig, University of Arizona http://www.evolutionary-ecology.com/Podcast/Podcast_Frames.html

2 Kelly Leask, Prairie Originals <http://www.prairieoriginals.com/>

3 <https://thegrowguide.libsyn.com/episode-26-native-prairie-plants-with-kelly-leask>

4 Maggie Wysocki and Master Grower, Dave Hanson, The Grow Guide gardening podcast <https://thegrowguide.libsyn.com/revisiting-native-prairie-plants-with-kelly-leask-0>

5 Steven Dubner, Freakonomics Radio, <https://freakonomics.com/podcast/how-stupid-obsession-lawns/>

6 Professor Douglas W. Tallamy, University of Delaware, Bringing Home Nature Published by Timber Press Portland Oregon. <https://www.humansandnature.org>

7 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polar_vortex

8 <https://globalnews.ca/news/7369068/manitoba-2019-thanksgiving-storm-one-year-later/>

9 Got TP? By Alan Forbes, CCI Manitoba Condominium News and Views, Spring 2020 Edition <https://cci-manitoba.ca/sites/default/uploads/files/newsletter/CCI-MB-Newsletter-2020-Spring.pdf>

10 The Road to Resilience <https://www.climateactionmb.ca>

11 <https://greenactioncentre.ca/reduce-your-waste/local-food-options-in-winnipeg/>

12 https://energyeducation.ca/encyclopedia/Passive_solar_heating_and_cooling

13 <https://greenactioncentre.ca/module/composting-2/on-site-multi-family-composting/>