Ecological Landscaping on Cape Cod

Sponsored by the Town of Falmouth
Ashumet Plume Citizens Committee

WHY ECOLOGICAL LANDSCAPES?

The natural vegetation of Cape Cod is a varied mix that includes trees, shrubs, wildflowers and grasses. The Cape's natural beauty has attracted a burgeoning population who has replaced the local vegetation with houses and lawns, destroying part of what they came here to enjoy.

Native and non-native, low maintenance plantings need little tending beyond watering during establishment and occasional pruning. Contrast this with the time-consuming, high maintenance lawn that needs regular mowing.

Fertilizer is easy to misapply or over-apply. Fertilizers contain nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, nutrients essential for plant growth but devastating to our coastal and freshwater ponds. **Nitrogen leaching into salt water causes rapid algae growth while phosphorus leaching into freshwater ponds induces similar conditions.** These algal mats block out the sunlight and deprive the underwater environment of its ability to maintain aquatic life. Studies show that 20% of the nitrogen pollution in our coastal waters comes from fertilizer sources.

You can help stop the flow of excess nutrients into our bays and ponds by creating your own ecological landscape and by following the recommendations of the Falmouth Friendly Lawn (FFL) campaign (www.geocities.com/ashumet2001).

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

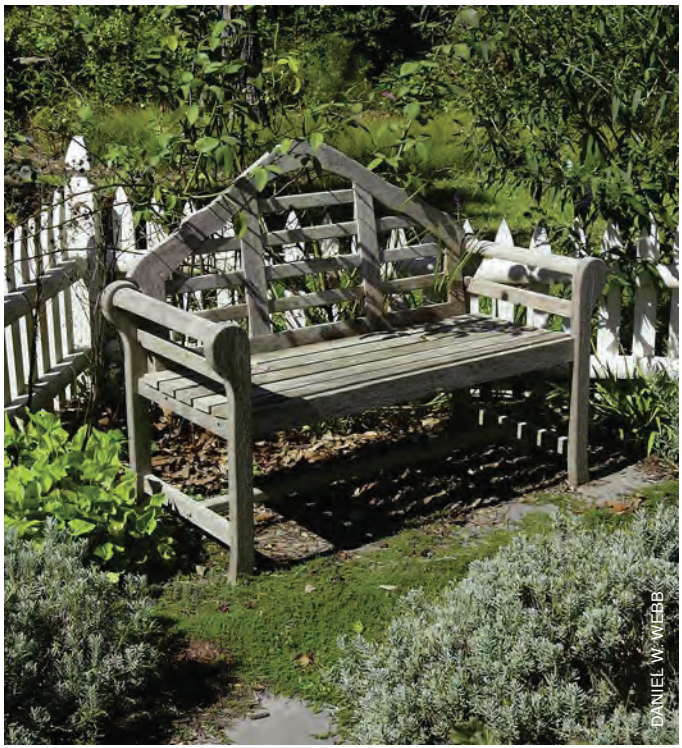
Native and non-native, non-invasive plants grown in the right place are low maintenance plants and the top choice for ecological landscapes. Native plants are those that were growing on Cape Cod before European settlement. Natives benefit wildlife and help maintain Cape Cod character. In addition, many non-native, low-maintenance plants also require minimal water and fertilizer.

Moist soils planted with summersweet and winterberry or sandy soil planted with bayberry, beach plum, bearberry, sweetfern or beach grass invoke the spirit of the Cape in a way that every visitor and resident alike can recognize.

GETTING STARTED

Start small. Choose one or two places where you could create an ecological landscape. Is one spot suited to a shrub planting? Might another require groundcover? Are there existing natural areas to preserve?

Choose plants that suit your property. Before thinking about specific plants, note what parts of your property are sunny, shady, moist or dry. Are any areas subject to wind, foot traffic, salt spray or other physical conditions? Notice high and low spots, boulders and vistas. What about soil conditions? Cape soils tend to be mixtures of sand, loam and clay. Plants that require good drainage grow well in sandy loam. Clay holds water so plants that like constant moisture thrive in this soil. All soils benefit from the addition of compost or other organic matter.



You can guess your soil type by taking a handful of moist soil and squeezing it into a ball. If it holds together slightly before breaking up, you have sandy loam. If it holds together, you have clay or a clay blend. Better yet, **have soil samples tested for type, pH (acidity), nutrient availability and mineral content** (visit www.umass.edu/plsoils/soiltest or call 413-545-2311 for soil test information)