
Opinion

SUSTAINABLE MARBLEHEAD: Green up your spring

By Jenn Mann

Posted Feb 27, 2020 at 3:01 AM

Updated Feb 27, 2020 at 12:43 PM

With only three weeks until the first day of spring, it will soon be time to let the fresh air in, explore the dark recesses of your home, and sharpen those gardening tools. As you prepare the lawn and garden for this year's growing season, here are some tips to make the process greener. Next week, we will address earth-friendly tips for spring cleaning the home.

Tips for the garden

1. Feed the soil instead of the landfill

One of the most earth-friendly things all of us can do is to compost our food scraps. According to Director of Public Health Andrew Petty, 40% of our waste stream is currently compostable. Composting reduces methane from landfills, saves resources, and returns nutrients to the soil where they belong.

You can compost your food scraps in your back yard, take your food scraps to the Black Earth Compost bins at the Transfer Station exit, or sign up for weekly curbside collection at \$99/year plus the cost of a bin and get a free bag of compost from Black Earth in the spring (<http://blackearth.com>). Right now, just over 400 homes in Marblehead, or roughly 5% of all households, are composting through Black Earth — we can do better!

2. Rethink the pot

Unfortunately, the plastic pots we bring home from gardening centers cannot be recycled in our curbside recycling bins or at the Transfer Station. Here are some alternatives:

- Shop at plant sales hosted by local gardening clubs, which reuse pots and often accept donations of pots.
- Get plant divisions from friends, neighbors or at plant swaps.
- Start your own seeds at home. Some people have used seed starter pots made from news- papers, toilet paper tubes, or cardboard egg cartons.
- Look for pots made from compostable materials. Bluestone Perennials makes biodegradable pots from coconut husk fibers, called coir (bluestoneperennials.com).

3. Plant for pollinators

According to the Pollinator Partnership, “Birds, bats, bees, butterflies, beetles, and other small mammals that pollinate plants are responsible for bringing us one out of every three bites of food.” Feed the pollinators by growing plants that provide food such as pollen, nectar and seeds.

Local horticulturist Gael McCully recommends these pollinator-friendly plants, which do well in Marblehead:

- Perennials: Astilbe, baptisia, bee balm, catmint, delphinium, echinacea, echinops, eryngium, joe-pye weed, lavender, milkweed, new england aster, phlox, salvia, sedum, sweet woodruff
- Shrubs: Aronia, butterfly bush, buttonbush, caryopteris, clethra, fothergilla, ilex verticillata, itea, Russian sage, blueberries, raspberries
- Trees: Amalanchier, oak, fruit trees
- Annuals: Alyssum, borage, cleome, cosmos, lantana, verbena, zinnia
- Herbs: Basil, oregano, rosemary

4. Ditch the chemicals

Many chemicals in lawn and gardening supplies can be harmful to humans and animals. Consider making your own natural weed killer. Use vinegar to kill weeds on driveways and sidewalks. Spray or pour the vinegar on the weeds

during the heat of the day when they are looking for a drink.

More information on earth-friendly gardening practices at this free event, sponsored by Sustainable Marblehead:

“Organic Landscapes: Alternatives to Chemicals & Natural Practices for Sustainable, Self-Sufficient Gardens”

- 7-8:30 p.m. March 2 at Abbot Public Library, 235 Pleasant St., Marblehead
- Speakers: Chip Osborne and Colleen Guertin Parenteau

Jenny Morton and Anna Hoffmann are members of the Conservation Working Group of Sustainable Marblehead.