

Woodscaping-

A Natural Approach to Landscaping Your Home

by Diana Olszowy, adapted from Northern Kentucky Urban and Community Forestry Council's Introduction to Woodscaping

Woodscaping is a term used to describe the active management of small woodland parcels or parcels on which property owners wish to create woodlands in urban and rural areas. It combines the principles of landscaping, site modification, designing for aesthetics, creating order with the principles of forestry, encouraging natural systems, creating balance between natural resources and the goals of the landowner. Woodscaping is landscaping, but it works with nature instead of against it.

There is great truth in the saying, "you can't fight Mother Nature." If you did nothing at all to your property, over time it would naturally revert back to a forest taking decades to centuries to become mature. But with a little planning and preparation, you can speed up the process and create your own special forest. The process is simple:

- Kill or remove the turf
- Remove undesirable or defective trees and shrubs (especially exotic or non-native plants)
- Plant new trees, shrubs and groundcovers
- Mulch bare surfaces to prevent erosion

Removing the Turf

Proper site preparation is essential to converting from turf to woods. Turf removal methods can vary widely depending on the size and condition of the site and the resources you have available. Heavy machinery such as a bulldozer may be needed if a large area is to be covered at one time. You can also use a sod cutter or tiller to remove the turf. But if you have existing trees and shrubs you want to save, this method may damage their root systems. Herbicide can be a safe, economical method of turf removal. Non-restricted herbicides can be used effectively by both homeowners and professionals. After the grass dies, you can simply plant your new trees, shrubs and wildflower plants through the dead turf.

Removing Undesirable Plants

Some lawns have other plants growing in them that are not compatible with or suitable for the native woodland ecosystem. Exotic shrubs such as honeysuckle, invasive groundcovers such as English ivy and injured trees that might pose a safety hazard should all be



Photo courtesy: Billy Thomas

Invasive species such as bush honeysuckle (shrubs) and wintercreeper (ground cover) should be controlled before doing any plantings. Invasive species will often outcompete native plants for growing space and resources.

removed as you prepare the area that you intend to plant.

Plant Native Trees, Shrubs and Groundcovers

Planting is usually a late fall or early spring activity. If you plant in the hot, dry summer conditions, tremendous amounts of irrigation will be needed and even then, some of the plants may die. However, all newly installed plants may require some

additional water to help them become established in the new forest. When planning your forest, think of it as



a three-story building. You have the tallest trees on the top floor,

Planting the right plant in the right place is very important. Do not plant trees that could grow into power lines as they will eventually need to be severely pruned or removed. Instead consider planting shrubs such as sumac, witch hazel or elderberry that will not reach the power lines.

Drawing courtesy: International Society of Arboriculture, International Society of Arboriculture, Bugwood.org

smaller trees and shrubs on the middle floor and the wildflowers and ground covers in the bottom floor. The size of the trees you plant is only restricted by your budget and your willingness to provide the proper after-planting care. You may choose to plant seedlings. They are inexpensive and easy to plant, but they will take much longer to mature and will require additional maintenance in keeping weeds from overtopping them. Another choice would be to purchase landscape-sized trees that are already 8 to 10 foot tall. They are more expensive and more challenging to plant, but they will provide that "instant" impact many desire. Some native trees to consider include:

Large Trees – oaks, hickories, yellow-poplars, basswoods, Kentucky coffeetrees, elms

Medium Trees – blackgums, hophornbeams, hornbeams, sourwood

Small Trees – dogwoods, redbuds, service berries, hawthorns

Shrubs are an important part of the understory of a forest. Like the trees, they provide beauty and food and cover for wildlife. They can be purchased as seedlings and in landscape sizes as well. Some native shrubs to plant are witch hazel, spicebush, sumac, viburnum and elderberry.

Groundcovers include all the small, deciduous plants that can be found on the forest floor. These are wildflowers, vines and other herbaceous plants. Some native groundcovers are goldenrod, aster, blazing star, Solomon's seal, coneflower, bluebells, trillium, Virginia creeper and May apple.



Solomon's seal is an example of a native groundcover.

Photo courtesy: Chris Evans, River to River CWMA, Bugwood.org

What to Expect for the First Five Years

In the first year, generous mulching with a leaf compost and wood chips will keep precious moisture in the soil and deter weeds and erosion. Use light mulch if you have reclaimed your land with wildflower seeding. You may have to provide additional irrigation if natural rainfall is not sufficient. In the next few years, as your trees, shrubs and wildflowers mature, repeated removal of resprouted honeysuckle and other

undesirable plants is the expected maintenance challenge. When your woodland area has established itself, aesthetics will increase dramatically and management requirements will diminish substantially.

Strategies for Being a Good Neighbor with Woodscaping

Not everyone shares the same idea of what is attractive and what is not. If you plan on using woodscaping principles to convert some of your property to a more natural state and the area is near a neighbor's more traditional lawn, then here are some simple things you can do to minimize any conflict:

- Create a border of lawn, hedge, path, etc. to frame the woods and buffer it from the neighbor's property.
- Recognize the rights of property owners to be different.
- Advertise by educating neighbors about what you are doing and what to expect before you start your project.
- Start small to develop your own learning curve and minimize the rate of change for neighbors.
- Civilize your new woods with human touches such as benches, birdhouses and trails in order to maximize enjoyment and link people with the landscape.

For more information about additional woodscaping concepts, please visit the Northern Kentucky Urban and Community Forestry Council's woodscaping publication at www.nkyurbanforestry.org/SitePages/download_files/Woodscaping_brochure.pdf.

Adapted by: _____

Diana Olszowy is Stewardship and Education Branch Manager with the Kentucky Division of Forestry. She is also an editor of the Kentucky Woodlands Magazine.

Kentucky Division of Forestry, 627 Comanche Trail, Frankfort, KY 40601; Phone: 502.564.4496; Fax: 502.564.6553; E-mail: diana.olszowy@ky.gov

Advertisements: _____

**Do we have your contact information correct?
Please let us know.
Call 859.257.7597 or e-mail forestry.extension@uky.edu with corrections or updates.
Please reference your subscription number above your name on the mailing label and list your addresses when e-mailing.
Thanks!**