

The Grass Can Always Be Greener: Pathways to Sustainable Campus Landscaping

By: Joan Van Grinsven, advised by Dr. Jean Lavigne and Dr. Derek Larson

Introduction:

Colleges and universities strive to have perfect lush green lawns to aid in attracting new students with a pristine first impression of the school's lawns and landscaping. Many of these students do not understand the high amounts of synthetic chemicals, water, and labor that go into making the landscaping "perfect" are unsustainable. Universities are one of the largest users of potable water in the urban landscape, but they are also leaders of innovative solutions to move toward more sustainable landscaping. The sociological expectations of colleges have begun to shift toward more sustainable practices, and there have been improvements in cost effective solutions that campuses can accommodate to their own goals create more sustainable landscaping. I conclude that with the variety of solutions available, colleges are able to cater these solutions to fit their own specific problems and goals. In addition, numerous available incentives will allow college to improve their sustainability, and marketing to prospective students

Xeriscaping at Pomona College



<http://www.flickr.com/photos/pomona-college/4756240338/>

Rain Garden at University of Texas - Arlington



<http://www.aashe.org/files/images/case-studies/picture2.jpg>

THE SUSTAINABLE SITES INITIATIVE

http://www.usbg.gov/sites/default/files/resize/images/sites_banner-823x175.jpg

Use of Native Plants



<http://publicgarden.ucdavis.edu/>

Methods:

I conducted a literary review of materials pertaining to college and American landscaping. I also interviewed grounds managers and sustainability coordinators at four Midwest colleges. This included interviewing: Jay Stadler and Martha Larson from Carleton College, Jerry Nelson and Suzanne Hanson from Macalester, Brad Sinn and Stephanie Pinkalla from the College of St. Benedict, and Nathan Engstrom from Northland College. I also conducted an interview with Fred Rozumalski from Barr Engineering, which is a sustainable landscaping firm that worked with three of these schools

Strategies of Sustainable Landscaping

Landscaping Practice	Description
Xeriscaping	Landscaping that is suited for the local climate with the main goal of reducing the amount of supplemental irrigation. Design principals includes: appropriate plant selection, efficient irrigation, minimal turf areas, soil improvements, use of mulches, and proper landscape maintenance
Upgraded Irrigation Systems	Can save up to 30% percent of water usage. Improvements can include weather-based controls, rain or freeze shut offs, ground moisture sensors, and setting automatic timers to run during the evening instead of mid-day.
Rain Gardens	Employs a design that uses plants with deep roots, planted in a shallow depression in the ground, near a runoff source to reduce the amount of chemical runoff into our waterways.
Integrated Pest Management	Pest management without use of widespread chemicals application. Management practices include: setting insect traps, hand weeding, being conscientious of planting locations, and fighting pests with natural predators

Turf Reduction



<http://www.macalester.edu/sustainability/initiatives/sustainablelandscapeplan.pdf> - "Macalester College Sustainable Landscape Plan"

Conclusion:

It is clear that there is no "one size fits all" approach when it comes to sustainable campus landscaping. My recommendation is that schools hire a sustainable landscape consultant to create a master landscape plan. This master plan is an outline of how the landscape will have to change over the years. The consultant will help colleges achieve more sustainable landscapes by visualizing what solutions are possible for the college's location and goals. Once goals have been visualized, schools can continue working with their consultant to solidify landscaping goals, complete landscape use surveys, and approve potential landscape drawings. The consultant can also work within the guidelines of the Sustainable Sites Initiative which schools can use as a marketing tool for prospective students. Once the preliminary work is done, the landscape masterplan can be published and schools can begin implementation.