

An aerial photograph of a suburban residential neighborhood. The houses are arranged in a grid-like pattern with streets. There are trees and green spaces interspersed among the buildings. A semi-transparent white rectangular box is overlaid in the center of the image, containing text. The text is in a clean, sans-serif font. The background shows a mix of green lawns, brown roofs, and paved roads.

# Regenerating The Urban Landscape

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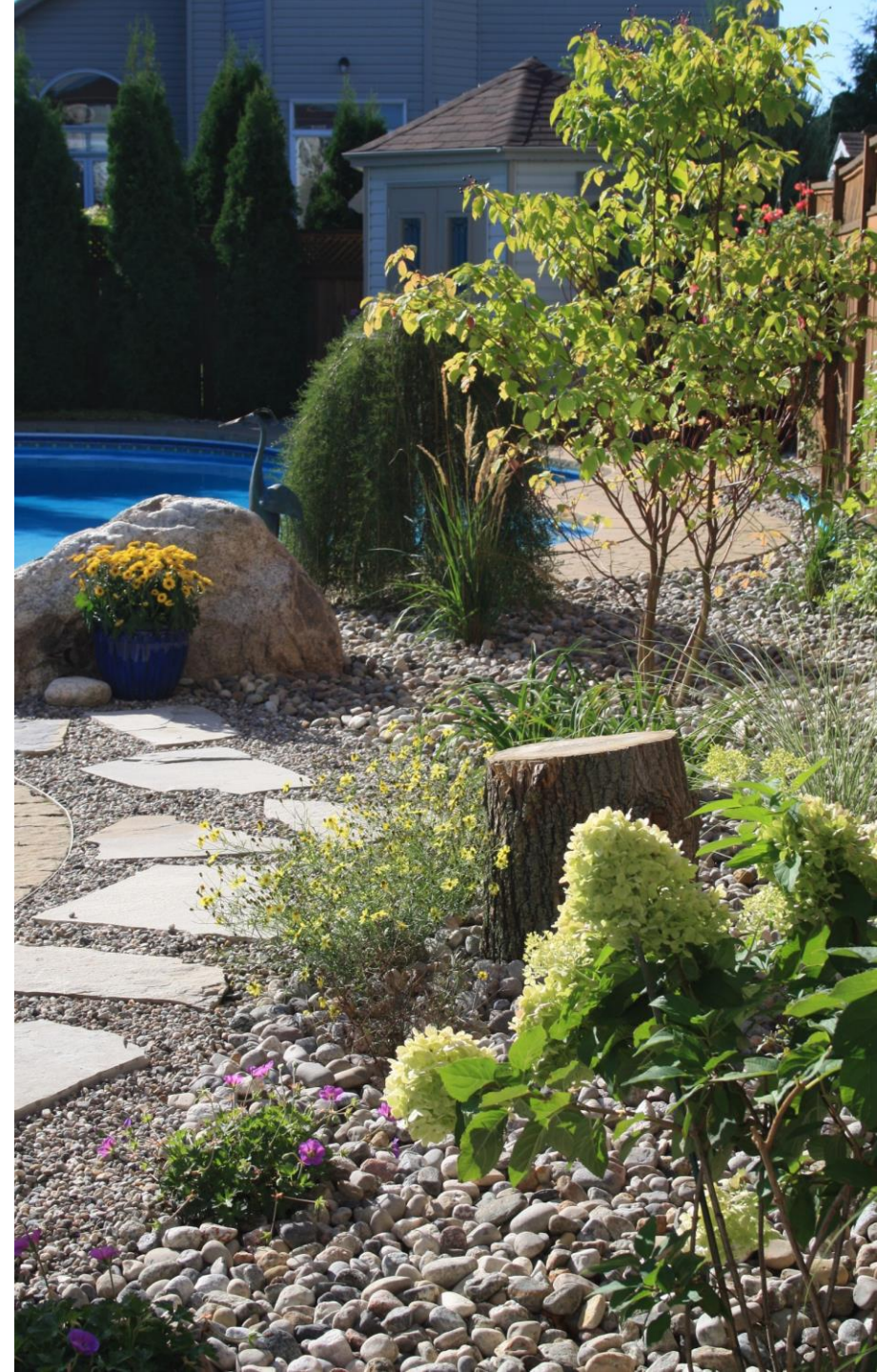
A Cultivated Art Inc.

The Canadian Society for Organic Urban Land Care



# At The Moment:

- The vast majority of people within Canada live in urban settings
- The horticultural industry acts as the gatekeepers to most green spaces through the provision of services, materials and the framing of expectations of what a landscape 'should' look like
  - Many currently standard products and services suppress natural cycles, degrade soils and limit biodiversity.
- Canadian landscaping services totaled \$8bn in revenue in 2019 and Canadian nursery sales totaled \$643.5 million in 2018
- Urban spaces are the end point for most of the organic matter currently coming out of the linear (rather than circular) food system





# The Opportunities this Presents

- With high density populations in urban settings, urban examples of regeneration are more visible and easier for people to directly engage with.
- The \$8.6 billion in disposable income that is directed into urban landscapes every year can pivot quickly as priorities change (as the rate of vegetable seed sales this year have proven).
- Many people who want to do the work of caring for regenerative ecosystems live in urban settings.
- Organic matter is where we need it to be, we just need to handle it properly and make sure that it returns to the soil.





# Motivating a Transition to Regeneration:

- Emotion and status are the primary drivers of landscape and horticultural expenditures.
- The horticultural industry creates spaces that make people feel good, either from direct enjoyment of the space or about how it represents their social status.
- On the other end of the emotional spectrum, anxiety and hopelessness are increasingly common responses to the ongoing breakdown of our climate and ecosystems.
- What if clients saw their investment in their landscape as an opportunity to directly participate in implementing part of the solution to ecological and climate breakdown?





# How this Affects Landscape Service Providers

- From a front-line standpoint, ecological and regenerative landscaping services require more people with more knowledge.
- What they don't require is an investment in new equipment or expensive products.
- Since regeneration revolves around restoring soil health and maximizing the living surface of the site, the material inputs at all stages of landscaping drops off significantly.
- More billable hours of labour + lower equipment and material costs = higher levels of local employment & lower barriers of entry into the horticultural profession.





# Public Awareness and Engagement

- To be socially accepted, the reason for the change to how a landscape looks needs to be clearly communicated.
- Different for a reason is generally acceptable, especially when that difference is attached to an issue that the public is already aware of.
- Rain gardens, pollinator meadows, food forests, community vegetable gardens, green roofs etc. all break stylistic norms in urban landscapes but have become accepted, and often celebrated, because of the services they provide.
- Soil carbon sinks and clean air islands are two additional services that could be framed in similar ways.






# Positioning Regeneration in Horticultural Sales

- Horticulture, as it now exists in urban settings, is based on emotion and social expectations. Whether a 'perfect' lawn or an oasis of diversity, we sell feel-good.
- As a society facing ecological breakdown, we are bombarded with bad news about problems that feel too big for individuals to fix.
- At a time like this the most feel-good thing to sell is the one that allows people to feel that they are making a local difference that contributes to resolving a global challenge.
- Add in the fact that clients can directly experience the benefits of having a thriving, diverse ecosystem around their home or business and you have a story and a service that appeals both to emotional and practical decision makers and is the most feel-good product of all.





A photograph of a small wooden shed with a sunroom in a garden. The shed has light-colored horizontal siding and a dark roof. The sunroom has large glass windows. The garden is lush with green plants and purple flowers. A wooden fence is visible in the background.

The copy of the slide show that you can download includes some bonus slides because I could talk about this for hours, but now it is Cameron's turn



# We Don't Need to Reinvent Regeneration

- Urban landscapes face many of the same issues as conventional agricultural practices.
- Loss of diversity and natural habitat
- Insufficient plant cover
- Soil degradation, including:
  - Decreasing organic matter content,
  - Loss of structure
  - Compaction
  - Nutrient leaching
  - Reduced soil moisture and/or poor drainage



# Regenerating Soils in Urban Environments

- The principals already developed for soil regeneration in agriculture also apply to urban soil regeneration and care, including:
  - Avoiding disturbance and compaction
  - Reintroducing biology (compost!)
  - Always keeping the soil covered with foliage and filled with roots
  - Minimizing (or eliminating) the use of any substances which disrupt the function of soil biology
  - In cases of extreme compaction, breaking the soil open as deeply as possible, without inverting the soil profile, and introducing biology into the openings before planting.



# Basics of Regenerative Urban Landscaping

- Take the time to observe and assess at the start
  - Work with the ecosystem and soils on the site
  - Work with the resources that are available locally
  - Minimize high cost inputs (fossil fuels, manufactured / heavily processed products, materials transported long distances)
  - Employ practices that build up soil biology
  - Maximize the regionally appropriate diversity of species on the site
- More thoughts on this on my website at [aCultivatedArt.com](http://aCultivatedArt.com)



# The Land Care Ecosystem

- To be viable the practice of land care needs to take place within a diverse ecosystem of plants, materials and services.
- This diversity also applies to the livelihood opportunities within land care. A few of these include:
- Professional Land Care Services
  - Garden ecosystem design
  - Coaching and training for gardeners/home owners
  - Organizing groups for mutual learning within communities
  - Insect identification and lifecycle monitoring
  - Water / hydrological analyses, design and monitoring on site scale
  - Soil testing, evaluation and remediation for home gardens



# Land Care Livelihoods in Skilled Services

- Garden system monitoring and care
- Caring for food based landscapes and working with food they produce (displacing the impact of processing, packaging and transportation of food produced off site).
- Creative production / manufacture of landscape components using local / reclaimed / recycled materials – adapting designs based on available materials.
- Natural stone masonry services
- Landscape component maintenance and repair – decks, fences, patios, steps, gates, retaining walls etc.
- Mixed turf development and care - In moist temperate climates turf can be a functional and healthy part of urban landscapes. Moving the perception of turf from a grass monoculture to a mixed blend of low-growing mowable plants that tolerate foot traffic and a variety of weather conditions while still protecting the soil.



# Land Care Livelihoods in Growing Plants

- Locally adapted seeds and plants
- Plants from diverse genetic material (seed grown rather than clone)
- Micro producers of local plants for landscapes, especially growing in already heated spaces.
- Local plant production, especially outdoor or in unheated greenhouses
- Sourcing, stewarding and distribution of native species as plants or as seeds
- Bonus service: Plant container collection, sterilization and delivery



# Livelihoods in Providing Materials or Products

- Composting – Collecting organic waste
- Composting – Biological inoculation (Bio-reactor)
- Composting - bulk scale from mixed sources (arborist, industry etc.)
- Soil inoculant (small quantity soil-sourcing from healthy gardens and forests)
- Aggregating and retailing sustainable / regenerative products.
- Construction and infrastructure material reclamation and diversion (big and complicated!)

# Interested in more about Urban Land Care?

- The Canadian Society for Organic Urban Land Care (SOUL) is in the process of developing a local land care hub in Ottawa with the intention of creating a local ecosystem of people and businesses working to implement land care based practices in urban horticulture.
- If you are interested in following this project and receiving updates, please follow SOUL on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/SOUL.Organic.Land.Care> or email me at [executivedirector@organiclandcare.ca](mailto:executivedirector@organiclandcare.ca) to be added to our newsletter list.