

Biodiversity starts in our front and back yards - Greetings from my Urban Farm

My name is Irma Battista, I live in North Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, in an urban environment. Similar to the majority of urban properties anywhere, lawn took up most of our property, with some shrubs, flowers and trees around the perimeter and driveway. We live in a very green and moist environment and thus moss and weeds grow rampant and it is very difficult to maintain a well groomed green lawn (without using toxic substances and a lot of hard work). I took a different approach – see story attached. I wrote this article for the West Vancouver Garden Club’s monthly newsletter. (Feel free to edit/shorten the article and use any of the titles above, should you be using the information in some way. Alternatively, if you are interested, I can also “custom-tailor” it to meet your needs better.)

I have been speaking to anyone who will listen about the basics of permaculture and the benefits of the bio-diversity I achieved just by changing our home’s front lawn into a mixed culture of vegetables, herbs, flowers, and smaller shrubs. I am influencing my Toastmasters Club, colleagues at work, my Garden Club, and of course all my friends and results of the influence are slowly starting to show. Last summer, our garden gave us a bountiful harvest of herbs, vegetables, berries, and flowers, and looked better than ever. The bees and bumblebees were buzzing around, the hummingbirds visited the fuchsias regularly, other small birds came in large number to feast on seeds, and the Echinaceas and other flowers attracted butterflies I had never seen in our area before. What a difference to our moss and weed infested (lifeless) lawn!

I thank you for your work and for encouraging the world to rethink, adapt a sustainable lifestyle, and enjoy the benefits of biodiversity. We all can do our part by adopting urban farming and permaculture practices in our yards, (even on our balconies and on patios). It is less work and more reward than caring for a lifeless lawn or power-washing concrete!

Cheers,
Irma Battista



On the left side of the photo you see just a little bit of the lawn...this entire site was lawn before and we converted it by layering newspaper, watered down and covered with soil, compost, manure, leaves, more soil...in layers. (I don’t have a digital photo of the lawn before summer 2009.) In 2009 we harvested loads of very delicious tomatoes, tons of squash (used for soups and cakes), green bush beans, lettuce, corn, oregano and flowering peas in addition to the black currents from the bush that had been there. You also see some of the flowers and the Fuchsia Magellanicas that we had there for many years on very poor soil with lots of huge rocks. The hummingbirds come back each year to the fuchsias, their favourites!



This photo shows the same area as above described, but in early summer, when it was freshly planted.



Shows the area around the Hydrangea. We have nasturtiums, dill, echinaceas (lots of bees, bumble bees, butterflies visiting these) brussels sprouts, thyme, summer savory, boxwood, bush beans, lettuce, jives, marjoram. This area was reclaimed from the lawn. This photo was taken in early summer of 2009.



This photo was taken in early summer and shows the front yard and a portion of the lawn that covered the entire front yard. The area was lifeless mossy lawn before and is humming with life now. By the end of summer 2009 it was a jungle of plants and flowers with bees, bumble bees, butterflies and birds abound. I harvested an incredible amount of Roma and Beefsteak-type tomatoes, potatoes (not planted, just from direct composting kitchen scraps), zucchini, green peppers, artichokes, huge amounts of a variety of lettuces and radicchio, peppermint, rosemary, sage, cilantro, summer savory, winter savory, nasturtium flowers and seeds, and all this was paired with irises, echinaceas, chamomile, day lilies, sea oats, Mexican grass, bell flowers, fuchsias, lingonberries,

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strawberries, rhododendron, rockery plants, and much, much more. It is overseen by our windmill palm that now has reached a height above the gutter line and is near the entrance to the house. It was a beautiful front yard during the summer and it was bursting with life. In 2010, I am planning to reduce the lawn even further or eliminate it entirely, depending on how far I get with my garden work. We hardly bought vegetables between June and early October last year and ate our harvest just from 50% of what was our front lawn and about 25% of what used to be our back lawn. Imagine how much this city lot will render when the lawn is reduced just to a seating area in the back yard! It is fun, it is great exercise in fresh air at no extra cost, and it saved me hundreds of dollars on vegetables last year. We have harvested seeds and will not need to buy as many seeds and plants this year – an improvement in the return on investment again. The soil is getting better each year also and needs less work. Watering in the summer is still time consuming, but soaker hoses will be laid down early this year to make that part more efficient and conserve water also.

Best regards and sincere thanks for bringing this to others' attention. It really has huge benefits and was very little work and expense, compared to what we spent on maintaining the lawn!!!

Irma