HOLMES

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No grass was harmed in the making of this cover

[before]

Less grass equals less mowing which is better for the environment.

GREEN SPACE

A Waterloo backyard gets a sustainable, low-maintenance makeover that's as easy on the eyes as it is on the planet.

When it comes to landscaping, green is the new, well, *green*—and landscape designer and contractor Derek Lippert is an expert in the practice of turning basic urban properties into feats of eco-friendly design.

Eric Breugst, an admissions professional at the University of Waterloo, chose Lippert's company, Naturally Maintained, to overhaul the backyard of his two-storey semi-detached home partly because his real estate agent recommended it. "But I also liked the environmentally friendly aspect of the company's work," says Breugst, who tries to make small changes—like walking to work, reusing and recycling—to benefit the planet whenever possible.

Because Lippert's focus is to create sustainable landscapes, grass is generally not part of the equation. Grass requires excessive amounts of water to grow, Lippert explains, and often pesticides and chemical fertilizers too. Instead, he uses plants that thrive with little water and that don't require pesticides, as well as locally sourced trees and natural rock to form the basis of his creations. "My sell on the concept of sustainable

KEEPING COOL: To keep your house cooler in the summer, reduce the amount of paved surfaces nearby, as these retain heat. Instead of a concrete walkway, install flat rocks with room in between for grass to grow.

"Sustainable landscaping requires less water, less pesticides, less fertilizers, less gasoline for lawn mowers and importing plants and soil. Less everything." DEREK LIPPERT, LANDSCAPE DESIGNER

landscaping is becoming less and less difficult," says Lippert. "Sustainable landscaping requires less water, less pesticides, less fertilizers, less gasoline for lawn mowers and importing plants and soil. Less everything."

In the case of Breugst's yard, which had been almost untouched since the homeowner moved in seven years ago, removing the grass was the best thing for it. "The yard consisted of nothing but a burnt-out, weed-infested lawn, a deck, a fence and a few perimeter shrubs," says Lippert. "It had little to no aesthetic appeal."

Breugst wanted a low-maintenance yard that still looked dramatic, so Lippert came up with a plan that included keeping the existing fence and open-concept deck, but adding natural stone walkways, a stone sitting area, a dry stream bed and hardy gardens with large granite boulders as focal points, all of which factored in sustainability and require little care.

"Derek came up with some great ideas right away," says Breugst. "Everything that had a sustainable aspect was just so simple to take care of. I really started to see the benefits of environmentally friendly landscaping."

Teamwork Once the materials arrived on-site, a crew of four, including Lippert, spent four days on Breugst's yard. "I used to work in landscaping and I initially thought I could do the project myself to save money," says Breugst. "But I realized it would have taken me forever, and I would have had to spend time and money renting equipment and sourcing plants. I learned it's a lot easier and more efficient to use a professional for jobs like this."

"There are a lot of things to take into consideration when completing a landscaping project," adds Lippert. "It can end up being a much larger undertaking than expected, and things like proper drainage or sub-base preparation may get missed by a non-professional. Also, what a professional crew can perform in three to four days could take a homeowner an entire summer of weekends. For many, it comes down to how valuable your free time is."

Although no permits were required for the job, before doing any work, Lippert checked for utilities, buried cables and gas lines. He also worked from a surveyed lot plan. "Working from a survey saves time in the design stage since we don't have to measure the boundaries of the yard," says Lippert.

Focal points The first thing Lippert's crew constructed was a dry stream bed (see "Eco-Friendly Design Solution," p. 41). "A dry stream bed is a channel filled with stones—about six inches deep—that crosses a yard," says Lippert. "In this case, it was primarily for aesthetics as there were no pre-existing drainage issues in the yard, but it does direct water from a downspout through the garden areas, »

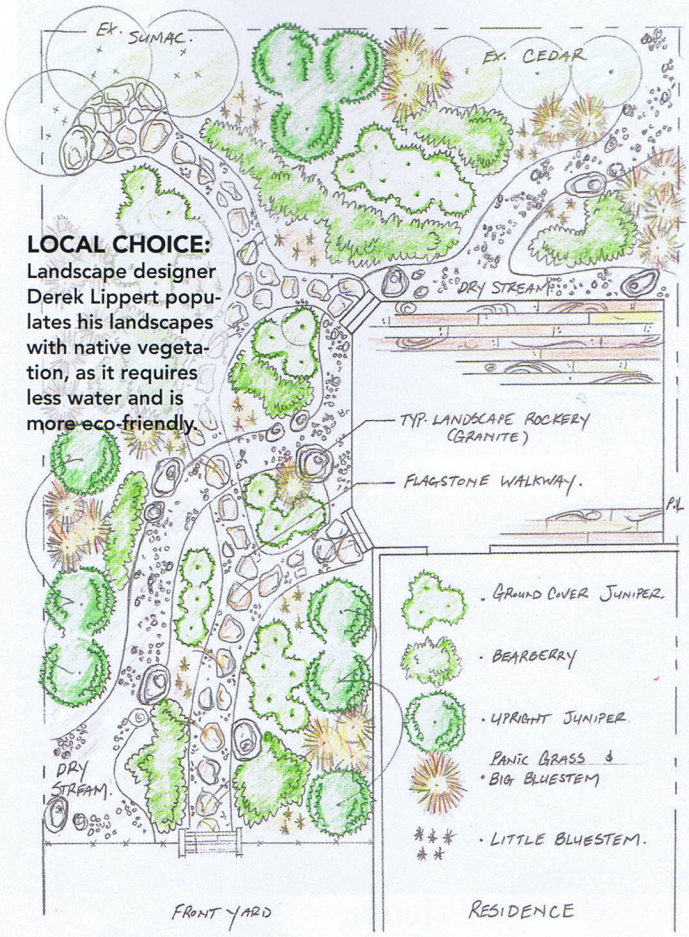
protecting young plants and mulch beds during heavy rainfall."

"When Derek first told me about the stream bed, I couldn't picture what he meant, but I decided to take his word for it, and it turned out to be one of my favourite aspects of the yard," says Breugst.

Next up were the natural stone walkways and sitting area, constructed from limestone. "Simple stepping-stone walkways like this one are laid on a four- to six-inch base of tightly packed stone dust," explains Lippert. Beneath the stone dust is a layer of geotextile. "This base material allows us to properly level each stone, eliminating wobbles, preventing weed growth and stopping the flagstone from disappearing into the soil over time."

According to Lippert, individual stones should be big enough—at least two to three square feet each—so they won't become overwhelmed by the landscape as the plants fill in. "We try to create a certain rhythm on these pathways, matching angles between stones and staggering single and double stepping stones throughout the walkway. It's important to consider length of stride and the pace you're trying to set when spacing the stones."

The sitting area was constructed using the same type of base as the pathway. "It's only suitable for a small sitting area like this one, that's as much for looking at as it is for actually sitting in," says Lippert. "A larger sitting area or patio requires a full eight- to 10-inch granular base and precise levelling of stones to ensure tables and chairs don't wobble around."



LOCAL CHOICE: Landscape designer Derek Lippert populates his landscapes with native vegetation, as it requires less water and is more eco-friendly.

Naturally maintained Finally plantings of juniper, bearberry and native grasses and wildflowers that grow in dry conditions and require little water were used to fill in the design. "The soil was quite dry and rocky, and the yard gets a lot of sun," says Lippert. But the protocol at Naturally Maintained is to work with existing soil, even if it isn't ideal. "We dealt with it by making sure we put in plants that would handle and thrive in rocky soil."

In fact, Lippert and his crew didn't add any soil to Breugst's property. "It's often the case with landscaping projects that they bring in truckloads of triple mix, because you can then plant whatever you want and you don't have to worry," says Lippert. "We think it's better not to throw down triple mix or any soil harvested from one site and brought to another, because ecosystems can be disturbed. Also, processing and transporting topsoil involve a lot of carbon emissions."

Once the planting was complete, mulch was laid over

Good to know Make sure that an arch that attaches to a fence is secured in the ground and stable enough to support the attached fence.

The costs ■ **Design** $250 ■ **Labour and equipment** $4,000 ■ **Materials** $2,500 ■ **Plants** $2,250 ■ **Total:** Approx. $9,000

the entire property. "To encourage growth without fertilizer, we mulch all planting areas three to four inches thick," says Lippert. He advises against using free mulch from landfill sites. "It's full of weed seeds and other unwanted vegetation." Instead, Lippert recommends using nutrient-rich soil from organic compost.

To maintain his yard as naturally as possible, Lippert has advised Breugst to hand-weed a few times a year, and spray vinegar on young weeds to keep them from growing. "It's not very much work at all," says Breugst. "And the best part is, I don't have to cut grass."

Unlike yards that depend on plenty of water and warm weather to thrive, Breugst's yard looks best in the fall, he says. "It's when things start to cool down and dry out that it looks really great. There are burnt oranges, yellows and reds, and the evergreens and wild grasses look nice too." »

ECO-FRIENDLY DESIGN SOLUTION: THE DRY STREAM BED

A dry stream bed is a channel filled with stones that runs through a yard to address drainage and moisture problems. "Yards are supposed to have proper grading and drainage created during construction," says landscape designer and contractor Derek Lippert. "But often this isn't the case, and a dry stream bed can help address the problem." For Eric Breugst's home, Lippert built a dry stream bed that directs water away from the house to a catch basin at the end of the bed. "During a really heavy rainfall, you'll see water flowing through the rocks," says Lippert. "Most of the water will be absorbed into the ground before getting to the catch basin, keeping the ground moist and preventing flooding." Here Lippert shares how he built Breugst's dry stream bed:

Slope it: I make sure the stream bed is actually sloping in the intended direction, which is away from the house. This can be checked with a level.

Line it: I always line the stream bed with geotextile to prevent weed growth and stop the cobblestone from sinking into the soil.

Imagine it: When putting larger stones in place, I try to imagine how they might be staggered in a natural stream, and then fill in around them with smaller cobbles.