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before & after | landscaping



BEFORE / When the couple purchased the home last year, they knew immediately they did not want to cut the grass on this slope.

no grass

organic landscape provides interest year-round

Story by Ann Hicks

When a Blue Ash couple began looking for a landscaper, going-organic wasn't a top priority. What the pair wanted was an informal, natural-looking back yard.

That's why they selected Wes Duren of Marvin's Organic Gardens in Lebanon. They had heard about him from a friend and liked his ideas for their landscape. Their first venture in organic gardening—using only things found in nature, no synthetic fertilizers or pesticides—was a plus.

There are four reasons to go organic, Duren says. It's safer, simpler, more cost effective and you get better results. "We mustn't treat our soil like dirt. Soil is alive," Duren says. "And we must have healthy soil for healthy plants. It's safer for people, too."

The first step was to get rid of the grass. The back yard is steep, with many trees and a creek at the back of the property. The couple did not want to mow the slope. In fact, they said they almost didn't buy the house because of the steep back yard. They spend a lot of time outside on their large deck and wanted a nice view from there, too.

Duren's plan: a pond, a number of different plants that would provide interest year-round, replacing the grass with pine straw and making trails of pine bark nuggets. "It was a good solution to a steep grade," he says.

Beds and trails were marked. A sod cutting machine was used to clear the lawn. Compost - 3 to 5 inches deep - was added, then 6 inches of pine straw. If you don't have access to a sod-cutting machine, layering wet newspapers on grass is another tried and true method of getting rid of it, Duren says.

"Pine needles have an allelopathic element in them. They suppress germinating weed seed," he says. Pine straw, fluffy at first, settles after a rain and is erosion resistant. "It's also insect resistant, helps condition the soil, and birds like it for nesting material."

All of the plants that Duren selected are shade lovers. The combination will provide perpetual interest. "There will always be something blooming, or berries, bark, form or movement," he says.

Selecting plants suited to the site is another key to growing organically, according to *Organic Gardening* magazine. That's so plants can grow without a lot of attention.

A stressed plant is prone to problems.

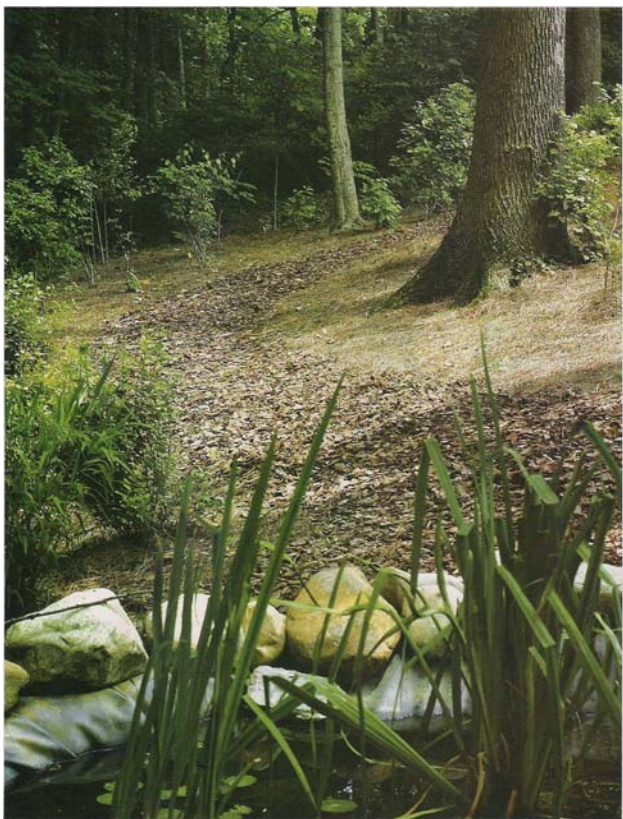
There is a diversity of plants in Duren's landscape design—26 different varieties.

The *Kerria japonica* (Japanese Yellow Rose) will provide blooms in early spring. The Purple Beautyberry is a summer bloomer. Hummingbird Summersweet is an ornamental shrub. There's a grouping of Green Jeans Currant, a good hedge plant. The witchhazel will turn yellow in fall; the sassafras turns red.

The Winterberry Holly loses its leaves in December, but not its brilliant red berries. The Northern Sea Oats provide movement during the cold months until it is cut back in the spring. Duren also chose several varieties of viburnum, hydrangeas and dogwood.

This landscape was planted in mid-April. "It's in its infancy," Duren says. "It will look better in three years."

A reminder: "Every good landscape needs maintenance the first few years," Duren says. "It sets the pace for maintenance later." **design**



AFTER | Pine straw replaced the grass. Pine bark mulch was used on pathways throughout the yard. Plantings are all suited to this shady spot.

The Benefits of Organic Gardening

- **SAFER** Organics derived from plant or animal remains have a positive impact on the environment, says Wes Duren of Marvin Organic Gardens in Lebanon. Compost, "oil for the soil," improves drainage, breaks down clay and helps plants get established.
- **COST EFFECTIVE** Organics reduce the amounts of pest controls we have to buy, Duren says. "Birds, insects and animals take care of the pests for us." Organics do not require the petroleum used to make pesticides and insecticides, another cost savings.
- **BETTER RESULTS** "You get bigger, brighter, longer lasting blooms and berries that are more resistant to pests, diseases and insect problems," Duren says. Another plus: organics eliminate water and soil pollution.
- **SIMPLER** "Fewer steps are necessary to get the same results," Duren says. "Build the beds, compost, plant the plants and you're done."

More advice from Wes Duren

- Don't plant too many plants in one area.
- Select plants that max out at the size you want.
- If weeds are a problem, spray them with pure vinegar while they are in the sun (but try to live with some weeds, such as clover, which is beneficial to the soil).
- Corn gluten is a good source of weed control because it's a natural pre-emergent. It may be applied any time of year. You will see the best results after the second season of use.
- Don't cut anything back in the fall-plants provide a habitat for insects
- Don't rake up leaves-they make great mulch.



Sources

Marvin's Organic Gardens, 513.398.5753

www.marvinsorganicgardens.com