



Distinctive Spaces

MEG MCAULEY KAICHER

Lush Landscapes & Garden Design

Integrating organic practices can bolster vitality over time

Fairfield County garden aficionados have the benefit of world-class experts practically right in their own backyards. The Gold Coast teems with well-renowned landscape architects and garden designers.

In conjunction with top nurseries that source many of the hardiest and most-desirable plants, whose staffs are educated with cutting-edge horticultural

are increasingly being requested by clients, says Principal Nikki Negrea.

Having incorporated organic practices for some time now, several of Negrea's client landscapes clearly show the benefits already of steady leaf composting and sensible horticultural practices. Using organic fertilizers, especially in vegetable gardens, can responsibly encourage bountiful growth that is healthy as well as beautiful.

masonry and fine planting.

States Mark W. Hicks, President of Elise, "Approximately 70% of our clients request some level of organic services. The best current practices now are able to achieve successful results while eliminating the need for many chemical products. Espoma and Messenger products often are used in management plans. While there may be a few trade-offs with organic products, the balance certainly favors green." Elise's nursery carries the popular imported outdoor furnishings lines of Janus et Cie as well as Haddonstone.

Kevin Huelster believes in the congruent combination of "aesthetic beauty, functional accommodation and structural quality with...sensitivity to local and regional context and respect for the land."

Huelster Design Studio achieves brilliant transformations, exemplified by projects such as that on Shore Road in Old Greenwich. Manifesting a unified exaltation of nature's elements, Huelster's plan installed a new walkway and foundation plantings which he then complemented with plant screening adjacent to the prop-

erty line. A transitional garden including lush hydrangeas leads to the backyard, which opens upon an enticing rear terrace with comfortable seating amongst potted specimens. This ultimately culminates in a breathtaking colorful waterfront terrace with swaying grasses amongst native perennials and potted annuals overlooking Long Island Sound.

"The harmonious relationship between the built environment and the landscape is critical in achieving the aesthetic and functional potential of a site. Our design values embrace this philosophy, and our affiliation with Katherine Kamen Landscape Architect, is a catalyst toward this goal."

Kamen is an accredited organic land care professional with the Connecticut Northeast Organic Farming Association, widely regarded as a benchmarking industry group.

According to experts at Hoffman



Landscapes, the use of organics in a property maintenance program is a step-by-step process that unfolds successfully over time. Multiple factors must be considered when developing an appropriate, effective upkeep routine that enhances

Left, above, and inset:
Greenwich Garden Design

knowledge, exceptional results are well within every garden's reach.

Superior service and outstanding design, with a focus on timeless, understated elegance are hallmarks of Greenwich Garden Design, LLC. Organic methods

Elise Landscapes provides sophisticated comprehensive design and build services, incorporating a home's beauty and its natural surroundings. Master plans are executed seamlessly with experienced landscape site-work, crafted

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Gault

the lush beauty of the landscape while enacting beneficial attributes for the local environment.

Simply using organic products alone is not enough. Sensible practices must be followed, such as proper shearing and pruning of shrubs, as well as optimal plant placement. Using plant material native to the garden environment improves efficacy and promotes longevity.

“Viable organic programs are based on promoting healthy plants and soil structure by integrating organic principles with modern technology and proper horticultural techniques,” states Scott Fawcett, Project Director of Property Maintenance at Hoffman Landscapes.

Fawcett goes on to explain, “Healthy plants naturally resist disease and insects. A healthy stand of turf maintained at the right height naturally resists weed infestation.”

The theory behind an Integrated Pest Management Program (“IPM”) utilizing organics is to develop a healthy environment from the very beginning, thus reducing the ability for weeds and pests to reach levels at which they become a detriment.

Sav-A-Tree, the expert certified ar-

borists, incorporate products like Predalure, a revolutionary method for attracting beneficial pest-fighting insects.

Years of scientific research have shown that when attacked, plants give off chemicals that signal to other plants that danger is near. The chemical also gives off a scent that attracts the natural predator of the



Save-A-Tree

insect or mite to help defend the plant.

By applying this fascinating knowledge of innate defense systems to many intensive experiments, scientists have been able to identify the various chemicals plant species give off in distress. Then, those signals artificially are imitated thereby developing a biological pest control for crops and plants in the landscape.

A controlled release pack is inconspicuously placed on the plant. The pack releases effective rates of the attractant for four weeks, luring the beneficial predator to the plant, thereby controlling enemy pests. Some beneficial predatory insects attracted by PredaLure include: lacewing, whose larva preys on mites, aphids, mealy bugs, whiteflies and caterpillars (each larva can kill 30-50 aphids per day); syrphids, whose larva feed on all soft-bodied insects and can devour 200-800 aphids in a 7-10 day period; and, lady beetles, who prey on beetle eggs/larva, aphids, mites, crawlers, scales, and caterpillars.

Hoffman Landscapes’ organic program combines organic processes with some chemicals to reduce the amount of chemicals used compared to a standard synthetic program. While currently there may be no organic solution for some issues, over time the program requires fewer chemicals. Turfs and plantings thrive because they are so healthy that weeds and pests find it difficult to infiltrate the environment.

IPM again is the key, in tandem with proper maintenance (monitoring and applying the appropriate product at the right time.) Hoffman has introduced organic methods into most of their property care packages. To build a healthy lawn organically, says Hoffman’s General Manager of Property Maintenance David Schrang, many aspects rightfully are integrated.

Nikki Negrea explains how “green” choices for masonry follow best land use practices, such as minimizing soil and environmental disturbance and erosion as much as possible; re-vegetation with ap-

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Guidelines for a good IPM program

■ **Lawn seed selection** Plant the selected grass seed based on factors such as sun and wind exposure, rainfall, durability, etc. This gives the lawn a better chance to thrive and lowers the need for synthetic fertilizers to keep it healthy.

■ **Soil aeration** This increases the activity of soil microorganisms; helps decrease thatch; increases water, nutrient and oxygen movement into the soil; improves rooting; and, helps prevent material run-off from overly compacted areas.

■ **Soil testing** Soil samples should be taken so that lab re-

sults can establish existing pH levels (the measure of alkalinity and acidity in the soil.) Then, assessment can determine how much lime is needed to bring the soil into balance. Proper pH levels are necessary to make all nutrients in the soil available to plants. Proper pH levels also help with compaction and other soil factors.

■ **Proper watering** Both appropriate timing and amount are critical. Often more harm is done by over watering than under watering.

■ **Mowing practices** Mow at the right height. A short lawn



is not a healthy lawn. Set the mower blade at least three inches high and keep it sharpened. This encourages stronger more viable turf.

■ **Over-seed existing turf** Regular over-seeding particularly is effective after aeration or de-thatching because the cleaned or aerated soil is ready then to accept the growth of the new seeds. A useful tactic may be to over-seed newer turf grass varieties into an older lawn which can help it withstand insects, disease, drought,

heavy traffic, and shady conditions. It also reduces the amount of fertilizer, water and pesticides required.

■ **Manure-based fertilizers** result in more frequent applications of more material. Organic fertilizers need microbial action and time to become available to the turf. Soil temperatures need to be high enough to support microbes.

■ **Weed and insect control** Here is where synthetic products still may be incorporated. Limit the use through proper application, as well as through monitoring.

appropriate choices (native in some cases); and, working intelligently “with” the land rather than against it while striving for the most natural setting.

Evan Wayne Associates will combine the design expertise of a Landscape Architect with the skill of a Master Carpenter, to create a unique swimming pool environment that is distinctive to one’s home and personal needs.

Having designed and constructed projects in challenging environments where others wouldn’t even consider the job, the company’s experts masterfully develop swimming pool projects that blend beauty with functionality while ensuring many years of pride and pleasure.

Evan Wayne Associates often complement outdoor environments with distinctive garden architecture that may include a pergola, a poolside bed, a cabana, trellis, or architectural fencing amongst superb colorful plantings.

Let Gary Tyrrell, President and Senior Designer, exhibit how Evan Wayne Associates is “more than just swimming pools.” Their exemplary unique pool designs provide far more than just swimming; they blend seamlessly into the environment and enhance lifestyle. The company is most deserving of the International Award of Excellence recently received by The Association of Pool and Spa Professionals.

Shoreline Pools maintains its overriding principle to provide exemplary attention to detail in planning, craftsmanship, materials and service. They have been setting the standard for excellence since being founded by the Lionetti family in 1968 and still are family-owned.

Over 3,000 clients in Westchester and Fairfield Counties have relied on the creation of superior designs and exceptional systems, coupled with professional installation and maintenance services.

With the finest quality construction, Shoreline installs top-quality systems for carefree maintenance that enhance any



Keith E. Simpson Associates



Keith E. Simpson Associates

luxurious outdoor space. Whether a client is building, restoring or servicing a swimming pool in the landscape, the company can provide the most knowledgeable service in the business.

For more than 140 years, one of Westport’s most philanthropic families also

has been one of its most storied mason and landscape retailers. A walk through Gault’s Westport flagship showroom, as well as its new Bethel showroom, is a naturally green experience steeped in recycled indigenous stone and organic materials.

Stunning vignettes showcase a variety of stone materials, including permeable pavers that are as stylish as they are functional since they naturally drain water and prevent flooding. Stone products like Lorado, Old Spruce Mountain, and Misty Rose flagstone enhance the overall attractiveness of a landscape, as might incorporating traditional favorites like bluestone, fieldstone, or Cambridge brick pavers.

Also worth noting are a bevy of lightly colored stones that naturally cool pool decks and patios by reflecting rather than absorbing the sun’s heat. Preserving Connecticut’s signature style has become Gault’s hallmark, as well as its calling card among residents who share a passion for the area’s rich heritage.

With strong ties to the area’s most influential landscape architects and designers, Gault’s knowledgeable mason and landscape gurus have been creating inno-

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vative outdoor spaces for generations. A complimentary Gault house call will inspire even the most house-proud to get out into the great outdoors.

O&G Industries has grown since its 1923 inception to become one of the largest and most diversified construction materials and services companies in the

tomers to visit while selecting product. In addition, five mason stores (Bridgeport, Danbury, Stamford, Torrington and Waterbury) service commercial clients.

Also a design/build firm, Steck's Nursery and Country Barn is one of the area's oldest nurseries that offers one stop shopping for landscapes, with proprietary

ery and landscape company of Fairfield County. Fifty-four acres of land were purchased by the company in Woodbury, Connecticut in 1988 for the purpose of growing more trees and shrubs because of the demand for larger and higher quality plant material.

Young's Nurseries of Wilton offers the most extensive selection of trees, shrubs, perennials, and annuals in Western Connecticut, while Young's Nurseries of Woodbury offers an extensive selection of plant material so popular in Fairfield County: 12 varieties of lilacs in sizes from 2' to 7', hydrangeas, wegelia, viburnums and many other flowering shrubs, alongside evergreen screening material from 5' to 24' including flowering and shade trees, specimen dwarf conifers, and a large selection of other ornamentals. With its state of the art equipment, Young's dedicated crew is devoted to customer service on a timely basis.

Working closely with a client is key to Roberto Fernandez's work, whose Greenwich company Roberto Fernandez Landscaping & Estate Management carefully evaluates client needs at hand as he develops an overall management plan. By employing artistic techniques to foundation color and structural form, he creates lasting venues that thrive. Fernandez's work has been featured in several area show houses, including Merrywood.

Favoring formal European garden design, Fernandez often uses focal points of statuary or fountains in the landscapes. Water or ornamental features deftly are balanced with plantings for exceptional breathtaking scenes.

Employing the talent of a trained landscape architect can transform an environment to showcase status.

Whether a long graceful allee gracefully lead by striking blossoming specimen trees or a grand estate property encompassing terraced poolside flora and fertile rock outcroppings, Keith E. Simpson As-

maintenance, irrigation, masonry, excavation and installation departments. Since 1897, it has been providing unparalleled quality in nursery stock, design, landscaping, masonry, irrigation, pool environments, and garden maintenance.

With an exceptional website as a resource, atSTECKS.com can design a total landscape, from driveways to garden beds. Committed to providing customers with the finest materials and workmanship available in the landscape industry, Stecks regularly trains qualified staff bringing years of education and service to its customers.

Young's Nurseries, Inc., founded in 1930s, has been listed as one of the top 100 nurseries in "Nursery Retail Magazine" for three years as a premier nurs-

Northeast. Consistently ranked amongst the top builders and construction management firms in the country, it is still a privately owned company in its third generation of family management.

O&G Industries is well positioned at the forefront of Sustainable Design. Scott Lockwood, Architectural Sales Representative, is preparing for LEED certification. O&G supports green building design amongst all its capabilities. Beyond product and service offerings, O&G's staff offers years of experience and the expertise to provide actual project solutions to varied clientele.

Four Earth Products Showcases (Bridgeport, Danbury, Stamford and Waterbury) exhibit elegant vignettes for cus-



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sociates, Inc. manages marvelous landscape projects of outstanding beauty.

Truly enhancing the existing natural forms, Simpson keenly draws out verdant flourishes from basic eloquent structure.

By identifying the existing natural potential beauty of a property, Simpson, a former President and Trustee of the Connecticut Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects, manages con-



Scott's Landscaping

sistently to combine those features with the program for a new use, resulting in significant property enhancement.

CTASLA provides an abundance of information to its members as well as to the public at large through its website and educational programs.

Learning through websites of area companies is wise. Research can be particularly useful for updating the spring garden with new or unusual plants.

Says Nikki Negrea, "Some of my favorites for spring 2008 planting include passion flower (*Passiflora Incarnata*) vine, which has fragrant, stunning displays of huge blooms; or, for a more elegant setting, espaliered pear (*Pyrus*) trees under planted with Greigii tulips--they are so

cheerful they make you happy just looking at them!"

Mariani Gardens is unlike any other garden center or nursery. Founded in 2005 by entrepreneur Mark Mariani, this luxury garden resource offers unique finds of rare and unusual trees and shrubs, annuals, perennials, statuary, fountains, decorative pottery and garden & home décor. The company offers knowledgeable, artis-

plants; they're evergreen and look good year round. Functionally, they're very useful in this area, because deer don't eat them," said owner Mark Mariani.

He added, "It's one of the most elegant and versatile plants in a garden. We can prune it into a tight, straight line for a more formal feeling, or let it be loose, for a softer, casual garden."

Servicing area landscapes for generations, the full service retail garden destination Sam Bridge Nursery and Greenhouses specializes in annuals and perennials. Three-quarters of the company's plant material is grown right on its own nineteen acres in Greenwich. This promotes superior quality.

More than a thousand varieties of perennials and over five hundred annuals are offered.

Sam Bridge also offers a variety of classes on its site throughout the year, most of them free of charge, such as "Organic Lawn Care" on April 11 and 12 with expert Dwight Brooks. These instructive enjoyable seminars are a pleasant way to spend a spring morning while learning. Such opportunities demonstrate Bridge's commitment to its community as well as company integrity.

Bridge's talented staff is widely known for its outstanding "...ability to tailor the client's ideas and visions into a predictable and realistic manner."

Scott's Landscaping & Nursery recently completed an exciting project in Ridgefield for a retired couple that decided to invest in their outdoor living spaces, now that they have the time to enjoy them. A new 120' long retaining wall was installed, a large percentage of the gardens were renovated and a magnificent multi-tiered waterfall with pond was added.

A portion of the property that had been overrun with scrub growth of mainly invasive plants was transformed into a park-like setting of ornamental flowering trees, shrubs and perennials. Fabulous native

Some of the progressive organic steps Scott's has followed for many years and recommends to all in the garden arena include:

- 1. Stop selling and installing invasive or potentially invasive plants.**
- 2. Reduce pesticide use substantially.**
- 3. Replace energy and chemical intensive lawns with gardens and ground covers.**
- 4. Use recycled materials whenever and wherever possible.**
- 5. Conserve water and soil.**
- 6. Plant native plants and replace lost and destroyed habitat.**

plants along a meandering path now provide different spots for reflection and meditation. The clients are immensely pleased with the work and have new projects in store for this season.

"A growing trend in landscaping these days is people's increased investment in their homes and landscapes, as it is often where they want to stay and enjoy their time," explains Rick King. "From pools and ponds to patios, built-in grills, fire pits, fireplaces and of course gardens galore, people have decided that improving their small piece of the planet is not only aesthetically pleasing and fulfilling, but also a wise investment that will improve the value of their property!"

However extensive an outdoor environment's updates need be for this season, take advantage of Fairfield County area experts. Visit Audubon Greenwich and learn how to free a lawn of synthetics; seminars are scheduled for homeowners on Thursday, April 10th. Purchase in-demand native plants directly from GEC to freshen your landscape; advance orders will be accepted as limited supply permits, now through April 23rd.

Merely by implementing one or two simple organic practices, you can improve your own environment healthfully and responsibly while enjoying nature's beauty.

Thanks to the more than twenty entities, both commercial and non-profit, that contributed to this article. References can be found on Audubon's website, as well as through websites of all cited resources. ■

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