

Background History for the Building 16 Landscape Restoration Project

The completion of the new Science/Math building (Building 16) in early 2001 created an opportunity for a major, innovative landscaping project. Science and math staff, and student members of the LCC Campus Ecology Club members proposed establishing a new landscape that could serve as an important educational element, while restoring a tiny piece of the unique upper Willamette Valley ecosystem on this site.

Project proponents received a small grant from the LCC Schafer Endowment and hired an outside landscape consultant to oversee project development; hired students to water and weed during the plants' three-year establishment period; and purchased the plants. The college's grounds crew agreed to provide on-going maintenance (mainly mowing/cutting) of the new landscape, as the care of this area was already included in the campus-wide grounds budget.

A planting plan was developed in summer 2001, and most of the plants were planted in February 2002 by volunteers from both the college and the Eugene Tree Foundation. Most of the site was string-trimmed in late spring 2002, except for a dozen or so small areas where late-blooming herbaceous plants were allowed to set seed before they were cut. Two student employees ensured that the new woody plants were watered throughout their first summer.

Early in 2003, areas were designated that would be mowed on a regular basis, both to provide better visual and physical access to the new landscape, as well as to suggest to passersby that the Building 16 landscape is, in fact, being cared for and not just "let go."

Landscape Functions

This landscape was designed to provide a host of environmental and economic benefits. It restores wildlife habitat that otherwise would have been lost beneath a conventional landscape of manicured and irrigated lawns, and shrub beds consisting largely of plants not native to this area. By featuring plants of this part of the valley, it helps to restore a "sense of place" for visitors and staff who may be unfamiliar with this area's indigenous landscapes. And it demonstrates an approach to landscaping that is water-wise (no irrigation required, once the new plants are established) and requires no fertilizer or pesticides to maintain it.

The landscape functions, too, as an outdoor classroom for a variety of disciplines (e.g., botany, zoology, environmental science, natural history, drawing, writing). And, after getting a little help through its first years, it will mostly take care of itself...for FREE! Nonetheless, its development will be managed or orchestrated, but the approach will be a light-handed one that works with Nature, not the traditional heavy-handed one that is most of the time doing battle with Nature.

This project also helps to connect the campus with the natural landscape of woodland, savanna, and grassland that surrounds the site on the south and east, beyond the south parking lot.

Natural Ecological Succession

West of the Cascades crest, every square meter of land that is not solid rock wants to become forested. Following a disturbance (forest fire, severe flood, clear-cutting, building construction, etc.), the landscape progresses naturally through a series of different stages, beginning with the “pioneer” stage dominated by grasses, native wildflowers, and non-native “weeds.”

Soon, tree seeds arrive, germinate, and begin to grow. (Sometimes, however, this phase is interrupted by the arrival of non-native Scot’s broom, blackberry, and the like!). On this site, we have simply accelerated what we believe would happen naturally, by planting a mixture of broadleaf and needleleaf trees that we think would do well here.

In the absence of continued disturbance (e.g., fire, grazing, mowing, or mechanical removal of selected plants), the site would become completely wooded. But we hope to manipulate the site to provide a variety of habitats, from grassland and savanna (scattered trees with grass/wildflowers beneath) to closed-canopy woodland or forest. In order to prevent the entire site from becoming wooded, we have chosen to mow (or cut) certain areas of it on a regular basis.

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Five Good Reasons For Landscaping with Native Plants
<http://www.pesticide.org/RHSLFiveReasonsforNatives.pdf>

Dear Chris, I want to send my appreciation to you for writing your landscaping with native plants article in the Home section of the Register Guard, 11/17/05. You did a comprehensive job stating reasons for using native plants in the landscape, made good suggestions about plant selection and some contacts for interested individuals. Many of your reasons have been taught by the guru of native landscaping in Eugene, Dennis (Whitey) Lueck. He has been teaching these reasons through a variety of courses over many years. His handouts and publications started reaching a broader audience by the mid 1990's--see the following URL

<http://www.pesticide.org/RHSLFiveReasonsforNatives.pdf>

Now I think it has been ingrained in so many people that the original source has been lost.

The Native Plant Society of Oregon, along with the City of Eugene, has published 3 guides to gardening with native plants in the southern Willamette Valley (one for shrubs, one for trees & one for herbaceous plants).

Lane Community College has made sustainability one of its focuses and in 2000 a group of LCC staff, students and community members decided to do Native Landscaping Project around the newly remodeled and expanded Science & Math Building (see attachment for Background History). Our efforts have been exciting and challenging.

Again thank you so much for your article and if you have any questions or comments please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely Gail Baker 11/18/05