



# the Green



# Sward

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*"Unity is strength... when there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved."*

**Mattie Stepanek**

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# Fall 2016

# Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre – Organic Land Care Case Study – June 2007 – 2015

**Major cancer research and treatment centre eliminates pesticides and synthetic fertilizers from their landscape and creates a real healing garden by going organic**

Through a sometimes uphill battle, the Head of Groundskeeping, Rohan Harrison, convinced his bosses to support an organic lawn care regime and this is what happened, as told by Harrison.

1. Close-up before:



2. 14 weeks later:



3. After 1 year, after another application of compost in spring, to same "NON-IRRIGATED" area:



4. 5 years later with compost applied only the first 3 years:



5. Mycorrhizal fungi applied in May 2015 to some of the 26 trees we planted in September (National Tree Day 2014). Trees looking 200% better since application, but the surprising thing is the grass around the trees are benefiting because of increased water and nutrient availability.



We started our full organic land care practices in 2007. Prior to that in 2005, we had introduced organic inputs to our inorganic mineral program with great success. These results encouraged us to adapt a totally organic program, from which the following benefits were realized:

1. Colour: The property now looks greener especially during the summer months.
2. Weed population: Weeds have been drastically reduced since incorporating compost applications to our fertility and cultural practices. It should be noted, if the practice of applying compost is not continued at least once every 2 years, there is a chance of re-infestation of weeds and compromised plant health. We have noticed this trend this year and will pass on the information to planners/managers.
3. Fewer clippings: Due to slower and more timely growth, fewer clippings are generated making it much easier to mulch (grass cycle), returning valuable nutrients to the soil. The property also looks aesthetically cleaner after mowing. Actual mowing time has improved since the grass is usually not as tall as during the first couple weeks following mineral fertilizer application. Also, there is less wear and tear on machinery because of reduced mowing and grass load.
4. Less fertilizer usage: Because of the above reason, we have reduced our fertilizer (100% organic Alfalfa) to 2 applications rather than 3 mineral applications previously used.
5. Frequency of mowing: With all of the above factors, we have noticed a significant relief in maintenance practices due to slower, more consistent growth to both turf and other plantings. Previously in the spring, twice per week mowing would be needed to maintain a 'manicured' look, which was challenging. However, since our organic program, once per week management is comfortably accommodated and if missed, still looks presentable.
6. Insects and diseases: Although we have no documented research findings, we have noticed a significant drop in certain disease and pest problems -- such as white grubs and chinch bugs -- and even less damage to our prized Sunnybrook roses. While we still notice the presence of white grubs, our turf root system is so developed that these insects can coexist without any apparent damages. In early observation, we are experiencing a dramatic drop in black spot and insect damages on our rose beds, which are also top dressed with compost. Turf areas which had chinch damage almost every summer prior to our organic program no longer reflect any insect activity and are satisfactorily greener during the hot summer months without irrigation. This reflects the benefits of applying compost as top dressing material in the spring to turf and beds.

7. Reduced mowing frequency: Because less cleanup is often required, that reduces our noise and air pollution. We are moving steadily to fossil-fuel free machinery, but still use the common tools of the horticulture trade that generate some pollution.
8. Plant health: The health of our shrubs, perennials, annuals and trees is significantly improved from a visual perspective. We have also noticed an increase in 'acceptable' wildlife.
9. Wildlife relationship: We have observed a recent increase in butterflies, birds and bees. These pollinators are great indicators of the health of our landscapes here at Sunnybrook.

### Key points

- Once we embraced the fact that land care is not about warfare against pests, but rather the welfare of plants, we were able to create beautiful, sustainable landscapes within the parameters of shrinking resources.
- Once we realized and addressed that our soil microbes played a pivotal and determining role in the health of our plants, we got results never before experienced with previous practices.
- We have noticed, like in humans, proper nutrition (soil management) is the fundamental tool in creating and maintaining a healthy, environmentally friendly and sustainable landscape – that HEALS!

Today we have beautiful, healthy, low-maintenance landscapes without using conventional fertilizers and pesticides.

### Authors:

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Luis Oliveira, Grounds Management, Sunnybrook Health Centre - Environmental Services. Luis Oliveira is a graduate of the Organic Land Care Accreditation Course from Gaia College delivered at Landscape Ontario, Milton. Astrid Muschalla, SOUL\* Certified Organic Land Care Professional, teaches the Organic Land Care Accreditation course and also consults for the City of Toronto on organic land care for Corktown Common Park with more parks transitioning to organic in 2017.

For more information about upcoming Organic Land Care Accreditation courses go to <http://www.gaiacollege.ca/organic-land-care-accreditation.html> March 2017 dates for Landscape Ontario Milton TBA.

Also, the 30 hour course can be delivered on site for groups of 10 or more, typically over 5 days (2 days per week with the exam on the last day of the 3rd week). The course is also offered online.

\*SOUL - Society of Organic Urban Land Care - website <http://www.organiclandcare.org/>  
Become an Accredited Organic Land Care Practitioner Living Green Infrastructure (LGI) and Low Impact Development (LID) are bringing new constraints and opportunities to landscape professionals. There is a need for new approaches and tools to address the demands for ecologically sensitive and sustainable land care solutions. The Organic Land Care Accreditation course fills that need, providing experienced landscape professionals with the know-how to support plant health in an environmentally responsible way through creating and maintaining healthy living soils. Support for the process of transitioning a landscape from chemical dependency to organic self-sufficiency is what sets this course apart from traditional soil science courses.

The 30 hour intensive, professional course covers topics such as:

- What does "organic" really mean?
- Ecological foundation of organic practice
- Health within ecosystems
- Soil ecology, biology and chemistry
- Soil / water relationship and water management
- Soil testing
- Nutritional causes of landscape health problems
- Soil systems management
- Pesticides and their effect on ecosystems
- Unintended side effects of some conventional landscape practices
- Transitioning landscapes to organic practices

The course is for those with previous landscaping education/experience only.

This course meets the education requirement for writing the Accredited Organic Land Care Practitioner exam from the Society of Organic Urban Land Care, Canada's association for professional organic land care. Continuing Education Credits can also be earned to maintain industry certifications (ISA, IPM, CNLA, MGOI, NALP). See more info at [www.GaiaCollege.ca](http://www.GaiaCollege.ca)



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