

Real Estate

Sun.04.18.10



Historic East Hampton, N.Y., is a charming enclave with sky-high real estate prices. Getting Away 2

Simple steps to a healthier yard

Skip chemicals, reduce lawn area and go electric

By TOM SKEVIN
STAFF WRITER

Having a green thumb takes on new meaning these days.

The awareness of environmentally friendly products and practices is taking root when it comes to lawn care and alternatives to the big patch of green grass that looks like the 18th hole at Augusta National.

It could be anything from getting away from grass-only as lawn cover to eschewing pesticides and commercial fertilizers, to getting rid of the gas mower and watering less.

"I have friends that shop at Whole Foods and buy organic ... but their kids run around on chemicals in their own yards," said Lisa Carson of Demarest, who picked up eco-friendly practices from her parents. "We have not used chemicals in 20-some years and have a beautiful yard."

Three major steps you can take are reducing the size of the lawn, reducing or eliminating use of pesticides and commercial fertilizers, and using less water.

So let's put on the gardening gloves and dig in.

Less lawn

Here, going green means less green — less lawn, that is.

"Reducing a lawn benefits both the environment and your wallet," said Chris Cipriano of Cipriano Landscape Design in Ramsey. "It

Give your lawn mower no gas

When it comes to cutting the grass, homeowners don't have to go with gas. There are electric mowers available with cords and without. Don Leich became a convert by circumstance when his gas mower's carburetor died.

He decided to look into an electric, settling on one that runs on a battery and takes several hours to recharge. It takes him about 40 minutes to mow three-tenths of an acre.

"I have all the height adjustment I need [and] it can handle overgrown patches," Leich says, adding his only maintenance is wiping off the grass clippings and mud.

Want to go two steps beyond gas-powered machines? No need to dust off the old eco-friendly model in the grandparents' garage. Just do a Web search on "push mowers."

Manufacturers and retailers tout them as being vastly improved over versions that were pushed around during the Nixon administration.

Base models can be had for under \$100; deluxe ones for around \$275.

For electric mowers, prices range from under \$200 to over \$400.

— Tom Skevin

is quite easy to recoup 'green' expenses when you consider 40 percent of your annual water bill [can go] to watering the lawn. By reducing the lawn area, homeowners can significantly reduce weekly maintenance bills."

He suggests creating a wildflower meadow, extending existing flower beds with perennials, planting an herb garden or setting aside a few areas for shrubs that shed leaves annually.

A wildflower garden starts at about 65 cents a square foot installed, including the removal of existing grass, Cipriano says.

There are other alternatives as well.

"Although grass is an excellent ground cover, there are circumstances where it is not the best choice," said Will Gutierrez of Lawn-A-Live in Ridgewood. "For example, in shady areas it is better to use mulch and shade-loving plants. In areas with excessive traffic or close to roads, it is best to use pebbles, gravel or stone."

Careful cutting

Want to cut down on noise and air pollution while cutting what's left of the lawn? Use an electric mower.

Jane Adler of Leonia does.

"Mine weighs about as much as a vacuum cleaner, so it makes mowing about as difficult as vacuuming the lawn," said Adler, who has used one for about 15 years.

Regardless of power source, a mulching mower reduces the amount of clippings going into the waste stream. Other benefits: not having to remove the bag and put the grass in a container, and the mulched clippings benefit the lawn and reduce the need for fertilizer.

Going organic

There are a number of ways to improve the look of the lawn without worrying about what the kids and family pets are treading on, and what wildlife is exposed to.



See GREEN Page R-4



Freehold Pointe

Freehold, Monmouth County

Single family estates - limited availability!

Priced from the low \$600's • (732) 294 - 8800

The Village at Chapel Hill

Middletown, Monmouth County

Luxury townhomes - last chance!

Priced from the mid \$300's • (732) 345 - 1699

ACTIVE ADULT COMMUNITIES

Renaissance at Cranbury Crossing

Monroe Twp., Middlesex County

2-3 bedroom single family home designs

Priced from the mid \$200's • (609) 860 - 9909

Equestra at Colts Neck Crossing

Howell Twp., Monmouth County

2009 Clubhouse of the Year

Priced from the low \$300's • (732) 987 - 9955

Elements at West Windsor

West Windsor, Mercer County

Intimate community in private setting

Priced from the mid \$300's • (609) 448 - 8555

Centex.com



*All prices, options, availability and square footage are subject to change without prior notice. Certain locations are subject to lot premiums, and additional fees. Void where prohibited. ©2010 Pulte Homes of NJ, Limited Partnership.



55+ LIVING IN WANAUKE, NJ

FROM THE LOW \$300's

Low-maintenance Living

(973) 248 - 5100

www.WanaqueReserve.com



55+ LIVING IN MANCHESTER, NJ

PRICED FROM THE MID \$200's

Single-Family Homes

(732) 657 - 3030

www.delwebb.com/RiverPointe

Del Webb

SHARED SPACES

A safe haven, and a step forward

Transitional housing gives women option

By **DONNA ROLANDO**
SPECIAL TO THE RECORD

Doris had three young children and nowhere to turn when she sought refuge from an abusive husband at Bergen County's Shelter Our Sisters Domestic Violence Shelter seven years ago.

"If I didn't have a place to go, I don't know what I would have done," said the 41-year-old Peru native who now lives independently.

Going from the women's shelter to her own place in Bogota would have been a big step for someone so emotionally damaged. But Doris didn't have to go it alone. Shelter Our Sisters (SOS) saw her as an ideal candidate for its Transitional Housing Program and offered her this step-up.

Before SOS, Doris said her ex-husband used her lack of citizenship as a means of control. She could not work and depended on him for rent, food and other necessities.

Today, Doris is a U.S. citizen and holds two jobs to provide for herself and her children. "When I got here [to SOS] it was like a light for myself and my children," she said.

For 30 years, Hackensack-based Shelter Our Sisters has been offering transitional housing to those like Doris who come through the shelter, Bergen County's only such emergency refuge for female victims of domestic violence.

"We were the first in New Jersey [to offer this transitional housing]. At that time it was called Second Stage," said Elaine K. Meyerson, executive director of SOS. "It was just as important then as it is now. Unfortunately there is very little affordable housing, and it takes the victims quite a while to upgrade their skills and be able to access employment."

SOS recently expanded its transitional housing to a sixth site, filling a need that has remained constant over the years, said Mary Ann Ploppert, director of transitional housing for SOS. A federal grant of \$450,000 also provided for a full-time bilingual vocational trainer, computers for the transitional homes and money to rent the sixth site for at least three years. The grant came from the federal Office on Violence Against Women, a section of the Department of Justice, and is aimed at improving the lives of domestic violence victims.

With the addition of this three-bedroom rental home, Ploppert said: "We have housing for up to 40 women and children



STAFF PHOTOS BY CHRIS PEDOTA

Mary Ann Ploppert, above, director of transitional housing at Shelter Our Sisters, says women escaping domestic violence need an affordable place to stay in Bergen County to help them become self-sufficient. Below, Maria Rojas, left, and Paula Madera, who both work for Shelter Our Sisters.

in six homes," which equates to nine apartments.

She talked about the importance of transitional housing to buy time for women to train for the jobs they will need to make the rent in Bergen County.

"Affordable Bergen County housing is difficult to find for mid- or lower-income earners," said Ploppert. "These women usually have no other option" but to seek transitional housing while they gain financial stability. "A lot are stay-at-home moms or women who don't have a work history or education," she said. SOS will try to connect the women with training so that they can become self-sufficient.

"Economic independence is crucial for battered women," said Meyerson. "SOS's Transitional Housing Program offers victims affordable housing and assistance as they work toward attaining economic stability and independence.

Without a living wage and long-term affordable housing, victims of violence are forced to return to dangerous situations."

Another benefit of transitional housing is it allows time for women and their fam-



ilies to heal and gain strength through counseling, like Doris did.

Located in residential neighborhoods, families typically stay in transitional housing for six months to one year but SOS does grant extensions when needed, said Ploppert.

One of the key qualifications for transitional housing is time spent at the emergency shelter. In addition, Ploppert said, "You really qualify by need. It usually means you don't have any other means" to obtain non-shelter housing.

Although thrilled with the grant, Meyer-

son said SOS is not looking to expand beyond the sixth home at present.

"We have to evaluate the homes we have and continue seeking funds to pay for this program," she said.

E-mail: rolando@northjersey.com

Fast facts

■ Shelter Our Sisters has offered refuge for women and child victims of domestic violence in Bergen County for more than 33 years.

■ The first SOS transitional housing unit opened in the 1980s.

■ Transitional housing has since grown to nine units able to accommodate as many as 40 women and children.

■ The average stay in transitional housing is six to 12 months.

■ Candidates for transitional housing must come from the emergency shelter.

■ Those needing the protection of the emergency shelter can call 201-944-9600.

Green: For yards

From Page R-1

For instance, the following recipe for weed control is from garden guru Jerry Baker in his book "Giant Book of Garden Solutions": Mix one teaspoon each of gin, vinegar and liquid dish soap with a quart of warm water. Spray weeds liberally in the cool of day, when not windy.

"I would heartily encourage folks to give organic property care a try," said eco-friendly veteran Ed Abahoonie of Englewood Cliffs, who once went door to door

when he lived in Tenafly to do just that.

Anyone interested "might start with the lawn" he said. "If satisfied, then don't hesitate to move on with the entire property — trees, shrubs, you name it — and never look back."

If using a service, "call your current lawn company and ask for a list of ingredients for everything they put on your lawn," said Demarest homeowner Carson.

If not satisfied with the answers, she suggests doing research and hiring an all-natural/organic lawn and garden company.

Before using any fertilizer, the state Department of Environmental Protection recommends having a lawn sample tested at the county Rutgers Cooperative Extension office to determine need. If fertilizer is needed, the DEP — as part of its Clean Water New Jersey program — recommends using natural and slow-release nitrogen fertilizers. Never apply if rain is forecast.

Less watering

Rainfall cannot be controlled; what can be is the use of sprinklers and watering by hose. Using less means lowering the potential for runoff, which can carry pollutants to the water supply.

"We use too much water to keep [lawns] green all summer long. Very often, we are overwatering our lawns," said Mark Becker, co-director of Bergen



Landscape contractor Chris Cipriano, rear, with customer Marianne Mancuso at a garden he installed at her Mahwah home.

On the Web

safelawns.org

cleanwaternj.org/garden.html

nwf.org (National Wildlife Federation. On home page, click on "In your backyard.")

SWAN, a non-profit dedicated to the preservation of the upper Hackensack River watershed.

Along with not trying to keep up with the always-green Joneses:

■ To collect rainwater for the

lawn and garden, cut a downspout to about 36 inches above the ground and place a sturdy barrel under it.

■ Water during cooler times of day.

■ When using the spigot, use a watering can or a hose with spray nozzle to control flow.

■ With sprinklers, sensors can be installed so they do not come on during rain, and flow restrictors mean less used per watering.

■ Adjust the direction of sprinkler heads if water is running off into the gutter.

Also, use mulch on flower beds and gardens to help absorb water. Put drought-resistant native plants in gardens and beds, according to

Clean Water New Jersey.

Another benefit of reduced watering, according to SWAN, is that it can lower the likelihood of restrictions due to dry weather and increased demand.

"Ideally, we should all live within our natural water 'budgets' so that such drastic and environmentally straining measures are unnecessary," said Lori Charkey, Bergen SWAN co-director.

E-mail: skevin@northjersey.com