

# Glemson Horticulture Student Essay

## Reflective Essay

By Lynn M. Taylor



Sustainable landscapes are just as important in small scale planning as in larger projects because of environmental reasons but home landscaping may ultimately be more important because of the implications of individual emotional and mental health. I recently spent some time with someone I had not seen in many years and for the first time I became aware of the implications for encouraging sustainable landscapes on an individual basis. When I first met this woman she had been in her 50s and was actively involved in gardening in her large yard in a rural area. The yard contained all the best of traditional southern garden plants. There were many large beds of azaleas, camellias, and hydrangeas. There were also some of the relatively newer plants that were popular at that time such as variegated acuba, Buford holly, and yew. Of course there were some nandinas still hanging around along with some boxwoods. At times the yard would be fragrant with gardenias or tea olives. During the next several years, with her children grown, the woman added more beds with flowering bulbs and other plants. She and her husband spent much time caring for the plants and being outdoors enjoying the plants. The woman is now 86 years old. Her husband died two weeks ago. They had been together for 66 years. I'm sure that she misses him constantly but she did not speak of that. She talked about the gardens that I remembered and said that she can no longer work in the garden and that she is having the

planting beds removed. Always being a practical person she said she tries to tell others not to plant high maintenance yards and keep their lawns simple. She said it might be good to have one small area or "corner" with a water fountain or something else special but people should not try to make their entire property spectacular. I had never thought about the loss of ability to garden as a source for grieving until that time. Perhaps a more sustainable landscape would prevent or decrease the potential for another life event that could produce loss and grief but there seem to be beneficial effects from the activities of gardening also. Maybe the focus of gardening needs to be different. I need to consider that for others and myself.

## Scholarly Paragraph

The Sustainable Sites Initiative defines sustainability as "design, construction, operations, and maintenance practices that meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (2009). There are three components that characterize sustainable development: socially equitable, economically feasible, and environmentally sound with the focus being on the intersection and interaction of those three components. E. Vincent (PowerPoint lecture, January 29, 2013) identified five steps to sustainability. The first step is to build and maintain healthy soil. This is accomplished by using compost, preventing soil compression and compaction, and avoiding erosion. The second step is to perform a site analysis and determine the right plants based upon the existing sun exposure, soil texture, water flow zone, and existing vegetation with native plants being preferable. Zoning ordinances, code restrictions, existing utilities, and available space should also be considered. Selecting plants with consideration of hardiness, pest resistance, and drought tolerance is the third step. The fourth step is proper planting with emphasis on planting at the appropriate depth, avoiding planting too deep, and keeping mulch from direct contact with trees. Initial maintenance involving evaluation and monitoring of plant health, employing smart watering practices, and maintaining mulch at two to four inches is the fifth step.

### References

Sustainable Sites Initiative (2010). *The case for sustainable landscapes*. Retrieved from [http://www.sustainable-sites.org/report/The%20Case%20for%20Sustainable%20Landscapes\\_2009.pdf](http://www.sustainable-sites.org/report/The%20Case%20for%20Sustainable%20Landscapes_2009.pdf)

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