

Designing A Biodiverse Landscape

(Is Variety the Spice of Life?)

CONRAD DECKER

At our Sunday, January 21st Meeting, we had excellent attendance and one big reason is that our speaker was Conrad Decker of Decker's Nursery! Conrad has spoken to us before, and we were delighted to have him back again for another lively, entertaining, and highly informative discussion.

Conrad covered a lot of topics, all of great interest to gardeners, but his unifying theme was the importance of BIODIVERSITY in our landscaping and gardens. He shares the current interest in Native Plants, while also stressing the important of aesthetics, variety, and suitability of plant to site. In other words, BALANCE, CAREFUL ATTENTION TO PLANT SELECTION, AND PROPER PLANTING TECHNIQUES are the keys to a beautiful and environmentally sound property.

Conrad enjoys helping clients design gardens according to these principles, but the first obstacle he often encounters is that customers want a lot of "sameness" and need to be educated about the importance of a varied planting. People also begin with a vague notion of wanting an "English Country Garden" or "Hampton Garden" without a clear idea of what and how to plant, and here too Conrad directs them to the most suitable designs for their property. They also tend to know what the "don't want" but not what they "do want"!

One of his biggest concerns is that there is a lot of Bad Tree Work going on, with people being advised to remove and replace trees when it is not necessary, new trees being planted incorrectly, and a general lack of awareness of proper tree care.

When designing a garden, Conrad advises using at least 25% native plants and then selecting the remaining plants based on beauty, growth pattern over time, suitability for the locale, benefit to pollinators, and a design that provides color and interest over a long growing season.

He distributed a most valuable handout listing the woody plants that he recommends for long Island gardens. The list includes: Evergreens for Screening", "Evergreen Shrubs", "Flowering Shrubs", and "Flowering Trees". A complete garden would also include perennials, and possibly annuals and groundcovers as well. His advice is to visit a nursery (Decker's would be a nice choice!) and see the plants in bloom. It is important for the gardener to "connect" with a plant before including it; after all, beauty is very personal and very important in a garden!

After his talk Conrad answered questions from the audience and then stayed for the rest of the meeting so he could interact with others, answer further questions, and learn more about our group and our interests and ideas.

I am guessing that every one of us ended the day with new plans and ideas for our own gardens, and with very itchy green thumbs, eager to start planting!