

NORTHWEST LANDSCAPE PROFESSIONAL



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Trends? Advancing The Industry In 2015 And Beyond

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It's not just the trends themselves that are interesting, it's knowing why they are happening and what they mean for the Landscape Industry.

"We shall never understand the natural environment until we see it as a living organism."

- Paul Brooks, *The Pursuit of Wilderness*

Ask yourself: Is this trend part of a larger mega-trend pattern? Answering this question can give the business owner access to powerful marketing insight. In short, it will help the owner to lead, not follow, the pack.

Regardless of the size and type of your landscape company, these patterns and trends are influencing your work and your clients right now.

Let's look at some mega-trends that are creating specific changes and opportunities within the Industry both in America as well as worldwide.

Urbanization

People almost everywhere are crowding back into cities. In the United States, as reported in Reuters, "...the population of urban areas grew by 12.1 percent, much faster than the country's growth rate of 9.7 percent from 2000 to 2010.

"More people residing in urban areas could drive up demand for housing, public transportation, road repairs, and social services such as schools and healthcare, at a time when city budgets are starving from cuts in state aid and lower property tax revenues."

And let's not forget the baby boomers. This vast group of people are choosing a variety of urban environments, often multi-family, for their retirement or semi-retirement years.

For the landscape profession this means greater intensity of markets in the private sector in urban or semi-urban areas using creative new design ideas, often smaller in scale but more intense in responding to these urban growth oriented needs. On the flip side, budget cuts are tending to restrict the funds available for public works related landscape projects.

Resource Scarcity Coupled With Rising Resource Prices

This mega pattern certainty is not new. What is new is the intensity of awareness given an increasing number of crises and near crises in the United States and globally with our water, mineral, metal, and soil resources. As a result, there is a corresponding increase in finding alternative solutions and methods for improving the conservation of our resources.

This mega trend surfaces as efforts toward sustainability and sav-

ing on both short and long term costs. Soil conservation and water stewardship is at the heart of this mega pattern. It will continue and intensify through 2015 due to resource scarcity and costs.

Rising Health Care Costs And The Resultant Emerging Alternatives

What do health care costs have to do with trends in the Landscape Industry? The increase in health care costs, coupled with a growing awareness of the shortcomings in traditional medicine to heal our ills, has resulted in alternative medical approaches. As this trend and awareness has grown, so has the trend to create health starting at home, in our garden environment, and the foods we eat. The use of organic fertilizers and environmentally friendly methods to control pests and disease continues to expand across all markets. The demand for healthy, organic foods has increased demonstratively every year for the past 10 years.

Organic veggie gardens in urban backyards increase in popularity, and now, as people look to cost saving ways to stay healthy, growing herbs and medicinal plants is a trending addition to the veggie garden. Knowledge and use of organic products and methods on the part of the landscaper is becoming a must.

Tightening Regulations

Long timers in the landscape profession will remember how easy it once was to get permits. Now the road to a permit can involve layers upon layers of meetings, codes, and regulations. As true to the bureaucratic spirit, regulations and legislation has only a one-way street – and that is to create more layers.

In addition, the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification program has increased tremendously over the years. In 2013, LEED was "seen as the new yardstick for design (and construction) and became a highly accepted certification system in the U.S. marketplace. As environmental awareness grows, so will the need for landscape professionals to have bona fide and well-accepted certifications to prove their effectiveness in environmental sustainability and integrity.

"Never does nature say one thing and wisdom another."

- Juvenal

Extreme Business Competition and Information Technology

Competition between landscape businesses, as with many businesses, is becoming fiercer. Technology has enabled even a small company to look like a rock star and compete on a higher level. With the increased information flow most people now receive, where it used to take a few exposures of a new product or service before a sale is

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Multipurpose rain garden for play, pleasure, drainage, wildlife.



Urban forest within one year on a slope.



Creative outdoor environment.

made, now it frequently takes over 16 exposures. Who doesn't check prices and reviews online now? Technology has changed how we are viewed.

With this increased competition and freely available information, it is more important than ever that businesses not only utilize these avenues to reach their clientele, but just as important, they walk their talk.

Here are examples of some of the opportunities inspired through these mega trends:

- **Office Outdoor Environments**

Commercial complexes are now looking for their own competitive "edge" to attract tenants. Building outdoor creative-social-work spaces that boast resource conservation, environments that are not only healthy and pesticide free, but that stimulate creativity, satisfy regulations, and do a lot within a small space, such as offices that open to cabanas and other outdoor rooms. These aren't the barren feeling spaces of older office courtyards with lonely sterile benches sitting unused.

- **Multi-Family Environments**

Likewise, there is a trend towards multi-family complexes versus single family homes. It's another response to urbanization through downsizing. This is another perfect example of the trend to design and build more intense and user-enjoyable outdoor environments within an urban setting.

- **New Perennial Design Movement Trend**

New creative perennial designs are increasing in popularity again in response to the above mega patterns. Perennial gardens are perfect expressions for smaller spaces and urban gardens are enjoyable, sustainable, conserve water, and create habitat for our rapidly-declining bee population.

- **Urban Forests Trend**

The concept of urban forests is not new. What is fairly new is the technology to create one a year with 300 trees in 1,000 square feet. Soil innovations have demonstrated the ability to save water, prevent erosion, yet establish forests within one year, even on slopes.

- **Rain Garden Environments**

The increasing awareness of resource conservation has the creation of rain gardens as a decisively growing trend. An example of a rain garden along a driveway satisfies not only drainage requirements, but is completely organic, creates a beautiful environment for exploring/views, increasing wildlife which provides the engineering structure to support the new driveway.

- **Horticulture Therapy And Gardens That Heal**

Responding to these new "lifestyle" choices, trends in horticulture therapy are slowly beginning to seep into the commercial landscape field. Organizations have emerged such as the "Therapeutic Landscape Network" which is a "resource for gardens and landscape that promote health and well-being". Such examples include the Portland Memory Garden, a sustainable garden directed to elders, caregivers, and many others, and the well-received sustainability projects in prisons that combine horticulture, landscaping, and ecosystems.

- **A Trend That Isn't, But Should Be**

I am referring to a new trend that starts out in the initial stages of construction with the intention to work with Nature. Understand that soil is a living entity, to be preserved and nurtured, not discarded when the first bulldozer hits the site. Understand that our man-made landscapes need living soil, not chemicals, to thrive. The soil is not a dumping ground for construction waste, paints, and chemicals.

Removing and discarding topsoil in the initial stages of construction, the lack of amending subsoil, and the importing of a few bare inches of fresh topsoil to install a landscape turns nature upside down and creates an environment that cannot thrive and that is ripe for sick, unhealthy plants, poor growth, pests, and disease.

The Landscape Industry continues to gain awareness of the importance of working with nature and the detrimental effects of chemicals and pesticides on our environment. However, a paradigm shift is long overdue within the whole construction trade when it comes to how we treat our soils, landscape preparation, and installation.

Gardens need to be FOR life, not against life.

Hendrikus Schraven's European background in agriculture and construction has given him a firm foundation in soil ecology, structural applications and design, and the role of organics in environmental health. In 1972, he made Seattle his home and within two years established what has become one of the most respected, environmentally-conscious landscape construction and design companies in the world. He has garnered over 70 state, national, and international awards for environmental excellence and erosion control technology. Covering the topics of organics, living soils, environmentally sound construction practices, and erosion control, he has consulted all the way from Haiti, Fiji, Holland, China, and Europe to New York, California, Arizona, Alaska, Washington State, and Hawaii. Through his company he supplies high-quality organic fertilizers, soil amendments and compost tea sprays, and equipment that have helped make his projects so environmentally successful.