

# THE IMPACT OF URBAN LANDSCAPING: THE GROWTH OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION

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## Background

Urbanization has been growing exponentially in the United States since the early 1800's. In 2010 eighty percent of America lived in an urban setting, by 2020 that number had grown by two percent.

The environment and access to it has declined as more people have moved into cities. Land and forest are being destroyed to make way for developments and skyscrapers.

Now people are left with little natural environment around them and even less information and guidance on how to care for it.

## Research Question

What can be learned from prior research and current landscaping practices, that can then be directly applied to educating and changing the framework through which everyone sees the urban environment?

## Internship and Methods

I completed my internship with HomeGrown Organics, a small environmentally focused landscaping business in the Seattle Area.

To answer my research question, I conducted informal interviews with both HomeGrown employees and HomeGrown clients. I also conducted research on the topics of home gardening, landscaping, ecology, and human interaction with nature.



Figure 1: A project I conducted during my internship. Removed invasive species and built a retaining wall.

## Results

Why does the general urban population not care about the environment?

There is little push to educate the general public and landscapers both of whom generally looking for ease of care and low price rather than environmental impact.

Decline in young age nature interactions, coupled with general disconnection from nature as urban centers grow has created populations that do not prioritize nature.

Themes	Sub-themes
Tensions between native and non-native plants in parks and gardens	Allocation of separate spheres for native and non-native plants  Gaining gardening inspiration from restoration activities and walks through bush parks  Competing values held for gardens – productivity (fruits and vegetables), variety and color (typically introduced flowers and leaves), unique New Zealand natives, habitat for birds and other wildlife, compensation for global habitat destruction, practical considerations
Tension between tidy and messy and how much of each is acceptable in the garden	Lawns as unquestioned necessity, symbol of order and tidiness  Large trees as source of conflicting emotions and values
Evidence of wildlife gardening with a particular focus on birds	Enjoyment of birds and other wildlife does not necessarily result in concrete action (e.g., protection from cats, gardening for wildlife) but untidiness in gardens is tolerated if seen to benefit birds or other wildlife  Birds as a source of enjoyment, part of daily life, at times taken for granted

Figure 2: Shows research indicating the possible main themes in home gardening and environmental care.

## Takeaways

### Educate:

Give more of a voice to those resources that help the urban gardening/landscaper

Putting forward an education basis for home gardeners that shifts the general perspective of home nature interactions.

### Evolve:

Society needs to pivot towards environmentally conscious practices, landscapers should lead the change.

Currently a large amount of urban environmental care is done by landscapers. Educating and making environmentally conscious landscaping a priority is a framework for change.

### Incentivize:

Very few people and businesses will change their practices without reason or assistance.

Buy-in for environmental change must happen at all levels. Government assisted programs have already changed how some landscapers and the public are interacting with the urban environment.

## Broader Significance

### Effects:

- Returning and increased biodiversity across all climates. Introducing native plants and species back into urban climates can protect those species who may have become endangered and return some who may have completely gone extinct.
- Ongoing research suggests there are physical and mental health benefits associated with increased nature access. Studies have shown direct links to an increase in people's mental health with more interactions with nature.
- Direct effect on the battle against climate change. Returning more plants and green spaces can only have a positive effect on the current battle our planet rages against climate change.
- Ongoing research also suggests increased place—belonging and future nature interactions can result from increased interactions with nature over time. Introducing, nature in abundance in the urban setting can only grow peoples understanding and love for their natural environment.

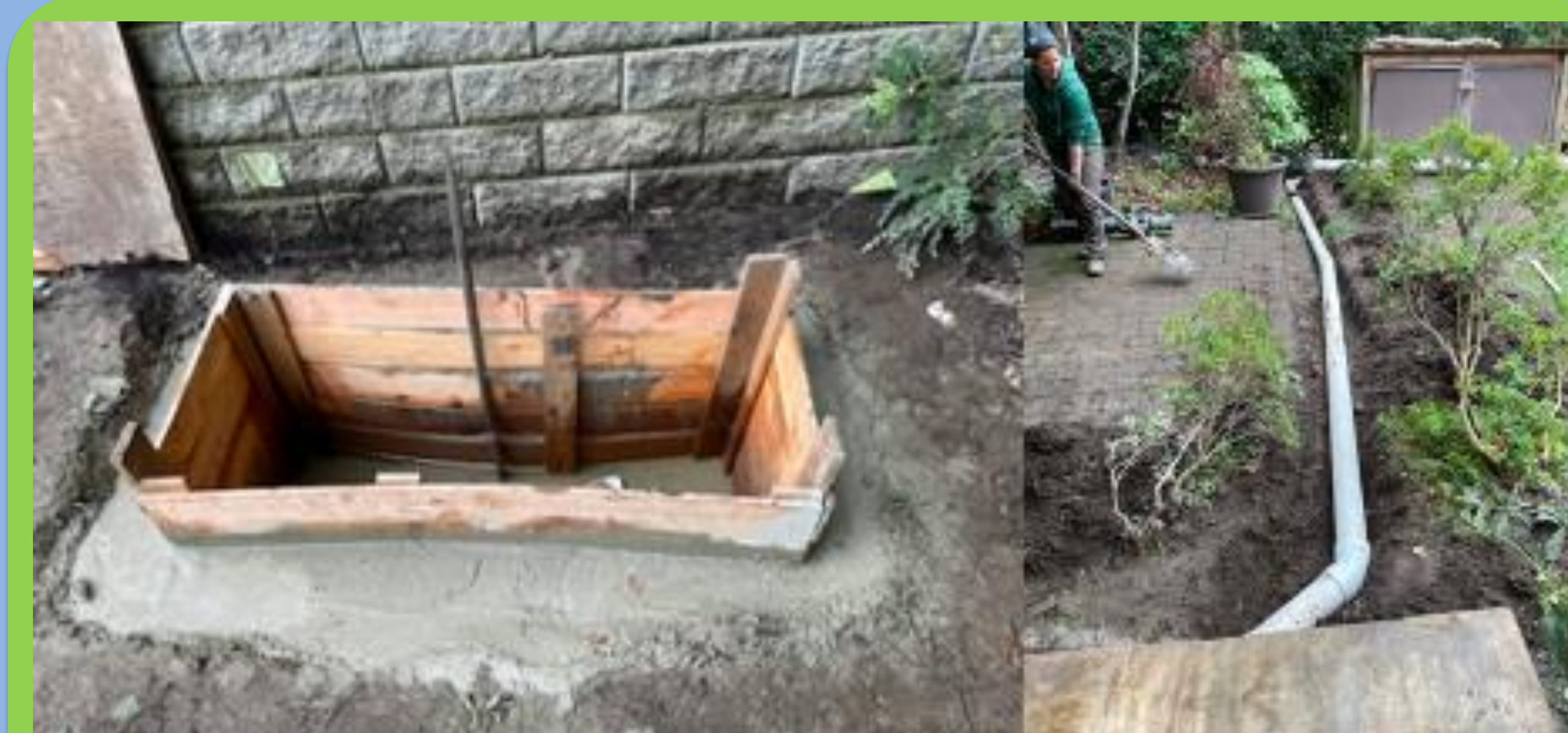


Figure 3: Shows a rainwater divergence system project that I worked on and was partially subsidized by the Seattle program RainWise.

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