

*eco*  *yards*<sup>TM</sup>

*Simple steps to earth-friendly landscapes*

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with contributions by Caron Wenzel

*Beauty Way Creations*

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To my father Bill Rama,  
a chemical engineer  
who came to support  
the concept of eco-yards,  
and who always  
supported me.



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# Preface

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I wrote this book for all those who want their yards—the small or large plots of land they steward—to be part of the solution to today's environmental challenges.

It can bring despair to know the crisis our ecosystem is in right now. I have found that hope comes through taking action. My desire is that *Eco-yards* brings you encouragement to take action and find hope in working with your own yard.

There are many books that explain the state of environmental crisis we are in and the challenges we face. This book is largely about solutions—actions from small to large—that you can take in your yard. I want to show you that in simple steps you can turn your yard into an eco-friendly sanctuary. In so doing you help restore the local and global ecosystem.

This book is also a call to beauty. We could have urban landscapes that are so much more beautiful and nurturing to our souls—wild, varied, full of songbirds, colour and movement throughout the year.

So let's do it!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janeen Sams". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Special note to apartment and condo dwellers:** Yes, you have a yard too! Whether it's your balcony, a window box or the grounds of your building, you can probably garden your little patch of soil in a more eco-friendly way. You can also work with the owner or management or the condo board of directors to have your grounds maintained differently or re-landscaped. In the long run this usually saves money on maintenance—a good incentive. Show them this book!



# Introduction

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## VISIONING OUR CITIES AND TOWNS AS LUSH GARDENS

In 2007, as I was flying home over the prairies to the city of Calgary, I looked out over the fields below and reflected on what I knew about the many chemicals farmers are using. Some part of me felt the sterility, the barrenness of the endless grainfields below. As we neared Calgary, I felt despair at knowing how the city too had been sterilized. I imagined driving home along boulevards of dusty, dry, shaved grass reeking of acrid pesticides, with my heart racing and mind reeling from reaction to the pesticides (I experienced chemical sensitivities at that time). I realized I was hating my city. I wanted to fight against those who advocated for pesticide use. I was in a reactive, battle-ready frame of mind—a state you could describe as warrior-like.

These thoughts and emotions were definitely unpleasant and not working for me! My stomach was in a knot, I had a headache and felt crabby. I wondered what this vision and energy were creating in the world when they were doing all this to me!

I decided that, from then on, it would be more healthy to focus on my positive vision for Calgary landscapes and my love for Calgary—the reasons I live and do this work here. As the plane banked, I could see the downtown cluster of buildings, the two blue-green rivers that flow through the city, the prairie on the outskirts of the city and the foothills and mountains beyond. I imagined Calgary as a place where the boulevards and open spaces were naturalized—planted with bushes, trees and perennials that would offer a feast of flowering and

### **Let your politicians see your vision!**

If you share this vision of a healthy, green city or town with naturalized green space and cosmetic pesticide use phased out, contact your municipal, provincial or state and federal politicians. Politicians usually want to hear from their constituents and they are the ones who have the power to put your vision into action.

colour throughout the year; yards were varied and interesting; meadowlarks and warblers trilled; the smells were of healthy soil and flowers; community vegetable, herb and flower gardens were in every neighbourhood; butterflies floated and bees buzzed.

Invigorated and more relaxed after this vision, I felt the importance of continuing to positively envision beautiful city landscapes and of sensing the beauty in the landscapes as they are now. I remembered that soil micro-organisms are amazingly hardy and resilient and can come back after chemical treatment—the land will recover to vitality and fruitfulness. I felt hopeful. I remembered that one of the most effective ways to create change is to hold a hopeful and inspiring vision that motivates you and can motivate others.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR READING THIS BOOK**

This book is meant to provide both inspiration for and information on gardening in an eco-friendly way. I suggest reading Chapters 1 to 3, Chapter 8 and “Overview” for a solid grounding in eco-yards. These, plus parts of Chapters 6 and 11, aim at giving you some background and motivation. The rest of the book will, I hope, provide you with the practical information you need to turn inspiration to practice. Read these other chapters as you need them to take action. Some of the information is repeated as it's assumed you will dip in and out of the book.

Throughout the book are drawings of soil micro-organisms, the key to healthy soil and the foundation of a healthy eco-yard. I feel if these vital beings, invisible to the naked eye, become more real to you, you will landscape in ways that nurture them.

Chapters 1 to 3 provide the how, the what and the why of eco-yards. Read these if you want to understand the rationale behind eco-gardening. Knowing why you are taking the steps to create an eco-yard can keep you motivated! Chapter 1, "The Gardener," is about how you can reframe your thinking to approach landscaping with an attitude conducive to earth-friendly action. Chapter 2, "What Is an Eco-yard?" lays out general principles of eco-friendly landscaping; it's an ecology primer. Chapter 3, "Why Eco-yards?" explains why earth-friendly landscaping is necessary for the environment and human health.

Chapters 4 and 5 are about maintaining your yard in an eco-friendly way. Chapter 4, "Eco-maintenance," addresses general maintenance. Chapter 5, "Weeds and Bugs" shares some strategies to work with these lively challenges!

Lawn is typically the highest-maintenance, least earth-friendly landscape, and much of this book is devoted to the hows and whys of replacing lawn with a more natural landscape. Chapter 6, "What's in a Lawn?" provides a history of how lawn came to be the dominant feature of our urban yards. As a step to replacing your lawn, and because lawn sometimes is appropriate, the chapter includes a section on ways to transition your lawn to more earth-friendly grasses for the locale and how to keep your lawn lush and healthy.

Chapter 7, "Making Beds to Replace Your Lawn," spells out ways to replace your lawn—some may be easier than you think! Mulch—organic cover to keep your beds moist and weed-free—is covered in detail.

Chapter 8, "Soil: A Feeding Frenzy," unlocks the amazing world of soil micro-organisms and how they interact with plants to feed each other and the world!

Chapter 9, "The Wonders of Compost," details how to make compost, worm compost and actively aerated compost tea, so you can build healthy soil in your yard.

Chapters 10 and 11 suggest points to ponder in designing an eco-yard. Chapter 10, "Designing Your Eco-yard," includes general guidelines for the design process, tips on hiring a

designer/landscaper, earth-friendly design principles, feng shui design principles and guidelines on choosing plants and designing like a musical composer! Chapter 11, "Water-wise Design," shows you how to design a yard you'll need to water very little, if at all.

Chapter 12, "Growing Vegetables," highlights ways to grow food in your yard and, in particular, features Caron Wenzel's eco-yard near Chicago. Wenzel is a contributor to the book, having written the base of the making compost and worm composting sections of Chapter 9 and also this chapter on growing vegetables.

Finally, the "Overview" is a summary of how to garden the eco-yards way. If you only read one chapter, read this one. Notes after each chapter detail references for information in that chapter. The "Resources" section, near the end of the book, points you to where you can find more information or the supplies needed to build your eco-yard.

I invite you to enjoy thinking about, designing, creating and nurturing your eco-yard!