

Enviroscaping 101:

How Landscaping Can Save You Money And Help Your Community



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What is Enviroscaping?

Enviroscaping is the process of modifying the local environment in a way that benefits your home and community as well as the ecosystem. Planting a tree or bushes to shade your home in the summer and shield it from icy winds in the winter is an example of enviroscaping.

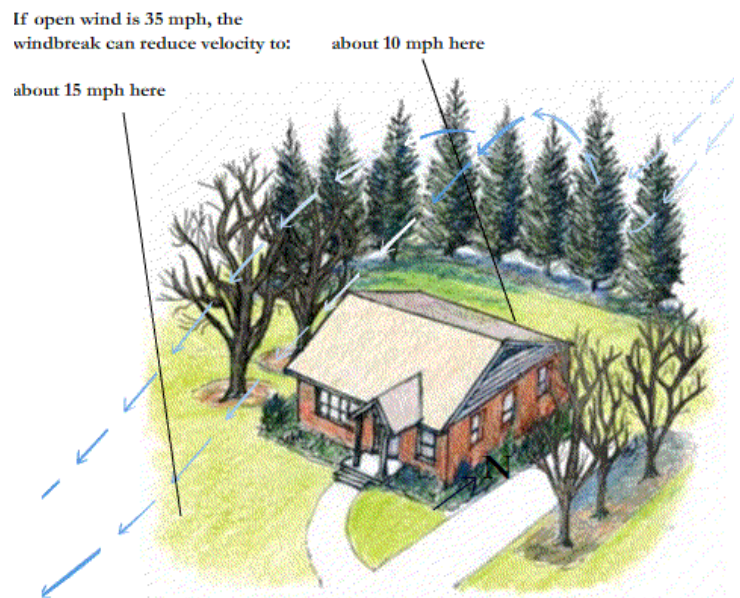
This isn't a new idea. Indigenous communities like the Anishinaabe nations, who still reside in the Great Lakes region today, practiced enviroscaping hundreds of years ago. Using locally grown materials like birch tree bark and cattails, they built wigwams inland, amid forests to shelter from wintertime winds, but moved them closer to water in the summer to take advantage of off-shore breezes.

Today, enviroscaping is a critical and often overlooked process that can benefit our daily lives and our communities. Properly placed trees can save money on energy bills and protect homes from high winds and flooding, while providing food and shelter for local animals. Prairie grasses and flowers absorb both water and greenhouse gases while adding to the beauty of a home, and providing innumerable opportunities for children to study nature.

In short, enviroscaping is a method to transform open land into a cost-saving, life-enriching, community-protecting and planet-friendly ecosystem.

Did you know planting the right trees and landscaping can help you...

- Save money on electricity and heating bills?
- Make your neighborhood safer and more comfortable?
- Improve the health of your family and community?
- Improve the environment?



How can enviroscaping benefit me?

- Reduces energy costs.
- Reduces landscaping time/costs (no lawn to mow and maintain).
- Increases real estate values.
- Prevents or reduces flood damage.
- Decreases drainage and water utility fees.
- Helps grow fresh, nutritious and free local food.
- Provides future materials for building.

More detail on key benefits:

Reduces energy costs

By planting deciduous trees (trees that lose their leaves in the winter), you get the best of both worlds. In the summer, trees shade a home and the surrounding land, decreasing the amount of heat absorbed during the day and reducing the costs of cooling the home by up to 50 percent. In the winter, the bare trees allow sun to shine through and help heat your home, but they also act as a wind buffer, keeping your home warmer and reducing your heating costs by up to 20 percent, or \$250 a year. Of course, homeowners should carefully consider the species, location, and growth over time to maximize these benefits. (Consult with a local ecological nonprofit or nursery to answer these questions.)

It is also worth noting that similar to cooling a home, trees help reduce “heat island” effects in neighborhoods by reducing the amount of heat that is absorbed by concrete. This can help keep the entire neighborhood cool.

Increase real estate values

Have you ever noticed how all new construction homes have young trees planted in front of them? This is because developers know that trees can increase the value of a home and make them sell faster. In fact, healthy and mature trees can add **up to 15 percent to your home’s value**, meaning a \$7,000-\$61,000 profit for median value homes in 2022.

Furthermore, research shows that trees **improve our mood, extend the lifespan of community members** and **reduce local crime**.

How can enviroscaping benefit my community?

- Removes pollution from the air and water.
- Helps reduce or prevent flooding.
- Creates needed places for wildlife to live.
- Helps cool the region (reduces “urban heat island effect”).

Trees and bushes are good for the environment. They take greenhouse gases out of our atmosphere to reduce climate change and provide a source of food and housing for our animal friends. And plants with deep roots help filter water, reducing our water pollution.

Trees and shrubs also help battle two major consequences of climate change in Illinois: flooding and heat. Most Midwest residents are facing greater risks of flooding or are already experiencing it due to extreme weather. Communities are also experiencing more frequent and intense heat waves, putting people at risk of heat stroke, asthma attacks, and increasing cooling costs.

However, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) says the average medium-sized tree helps reduce flooding by soaking up water with their roots and preventing soil erosion, helping to intercept as much as 2,380 gallons of rainfall every year. Trees can significantly reduce the risk of flooding for a home and the entire neighborhood, especially when paired with native plants instead of grass. Additionally, trees help cool down communities with their shade, thereby reducing the risks and costs associated with heat waves.

Trees also produce oxygen and **decrease air pollution**, helping to reduce rates of asthma and respiratory illnesses in the community. These trees and native plants can also include fruit trees and bushes, helping to reduce grocery bills and provide nutritious food to your family and friends. And finally, such trees and plants can save you money and time by reducing time and money spent fertilizing, applying pesticide and cutting the grass.

MYTHS about Enviroscaping

“Trees will ruin drain pipes.” False

It is true that broken pipes will attract roots because of the leaking water. But tree roots typically don't break pipes. Most tree roots only go down 2-3 feet, whereas water pipes are buried at least 42 to 60 inches below top cover.

“Trees can destroy homes.” Mostly False

Trees can fall down, but more often than not they actually protect homes from greater damage caused by wind, flooding, sun and storms. Talk to an expert about how to select and maintain the best tree to protect your home.

“Trees take lots of time and money to maintain.” False

Taking care of native lawns and trees actually saves you time and money compared to taking care of grass, because you don't need to use a lawn mower. Talk to an expert for advice on choosing the right enviroscaping to fit your time and budget.

“Trees make seasonal allergies worse.” Avoidable

While some trees and native plants do release pollen into the air, it is easy to select trees and native plants that do not. Talk to an expert for advice on selecting the best trees and plants to minimize or eliminate these issues from your yard.



Native garden design is seen in this photo by Tamima Itani, courtesy of the Lake County Forest Preserves.

What should I plant? (And where, when, why and how?)

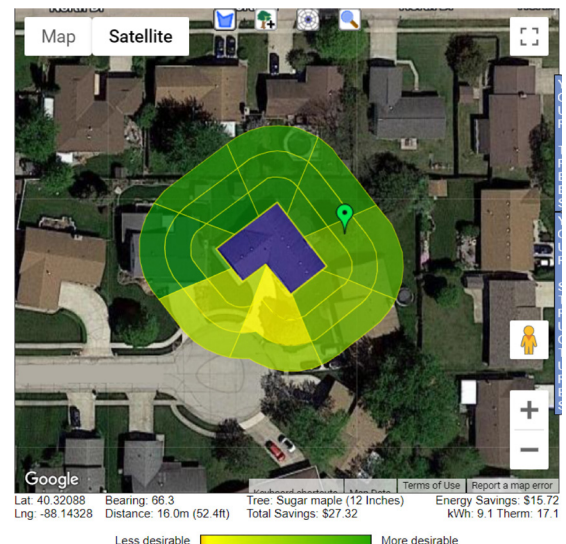
Every home is unique, but there are people, organizations, and resources to help you make the most of enviroscaping wherever you are:

- Use the design tool found at www.design.itreetools.org to help determine which trees to plant and where to plant them. Also, many local nurseries, forest preserve districts, ecology nonprofits, landscaping businesses, and colleges are happy to provide information specific to your community on how best to transform your property to better support your goals.
- Consider using stone edges, signs, bird houses, and/or edging fences near your natural landscape to show the area is being maintained that way.
- Consider testing your soil to determine which trees and plants will thrive best on your land.
- Before planting trees and native plants, check with your city government about local growing ordinances. You may need to apply for variances or select different types of plants.
- Some trees and native plants look more aesthetic than other landscapes. Discuss your enviroscaping with your neighbors to let them know about the changes and assure them that the site is being maintained.
- The best time to plant a tree and a prairie landscape is typically in early spring just as the ground thaws. Remember the old saying: “The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago; the second best time is now.”



Example natural landscaping signs

At the right is an example of iTree's mapping tool, which can give you an estimated energy savings based on your home's building characteristics and tree placement.



What will it cost me?

Planting trees typically costs roughly \$13 to \$65 per tree, depending on species, size, site location, site preparation and labor. Typically, the larger the tree, the more expensive. Meanwhile, native prairie grasses and flowers can be inexpensive to plant from seed. And remember: These investments pay big dividends for you and your home. Local governments, nonprofit community organizations or energy utilities may have programs that help cover the costs of your enviroscaping project at no expense to you or your business.



Sustainable ornamental grass

In fact, federal, state, county and local governments will often have budgets for energy efficiency, stormwater management, urban forestry, watershed and habitat restoration and community beautification. Start by checking with these departments of government: city or county arborists, parks and recreation departments, stormwater management, water works and power commissions. Also check with utilities and local landscaping and tree nursery businesses. Even if these entities don't have such a program, contacting them at least brings the demand to their attention.

For more information, talk to your local experts or see these Landscaping and Native Plant resources:

- Native Landscaping: www.prairienursery.com
- Native Landscaping: www.wildones.org/chapters/chapters-in-illinois/
- Tree Planting Resources: [Residential and Community Forestry \(illinois.gov\)](http://ResidentialandCommunityForestry(illinois.gov))
- Chicago Program: www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/our-roots-chicago/home.html
- Urban Advice: [Urban Gardening Advice \(Chicago Curbed\)](#)