

NGBH TRAINING PROGRAM WHITE PAPER *Jan 16, 2021*

Residents, families, workers, and visitors in Maine share a love of the state's wild beauty and native ecosystems while much of the state's economy relies on its landscape. Native Gardens of Blue Hill (NGBH) is dedicated to spreading the knowledge and practical tools needed to ensure the future of this precious resource.

More than 75% of Americans engage in gardening to connect with nature, and yet many are unaware of the disastrous ecological impact and dangers of conventional landscaping or gardening practices. Alternatively, when landscaping and gardening professionals use regenerative, organic practices they are prioritizing stewarding the land and commit to do no further harm, while creating alluring landscapes in which people may build stronger bonds with the natural world. This results in a practice that implements solutions to local environmental concerns such as water and soil pollution, habitat fragmentation and loss, and the decline of native pollinators. At NGBH it is our mission to highlight the beauty and value of Maine's native flora, demonstrate sustainable landscape management to homeowners, and support landscape professionals as they create gardens which provide valuable benefits to adjoining ecosystems. A sustainably managed garden of native plants can beautify a home landscape as it feeds and heals the surrounding ecology.

We initiated the program in Sustainable Landscaping and Garden Management with Kennebec Valley Community College (KVCC) to address a confluence of realities in Maine: widespread need for employment opportunities, extreme shortage of skilled workers in the sustainable, organic landscape profession, and increased interest in stewardship of our natural world. We will share our knowledge and resources with individuals who are unemployed, underemployed, or displaced from their work due to COVID-19 so they may build a career that helps protect and restore the ecological integrity of their communities. Students will be prepared to join a desperately under-staffed, large, local industry offering well-paying jobs. At the same time, they will have an opportunity to discover a field that is in high demand as part of a growing environmental movement.

Students will be introduced to a broad range of topics that promote awareness of the garden as a networked ecosystem connected to the environment beyond. Classroom sessions will provide site-specific management strategies for a variety of landscapes, sharpen students' observational skills, and, ideally, develop curiosity for further learning on the job and in the broader natural world. We aim to cultivate a sense of stewardship that students can bring to each landscape they encounter at work and in their lives. We will practice nature-based solutions that honor the spirit of place, considering the natural bounds and logic of each specific terrain when crafting design, management, and care strategies. As climate changes, gardens evolve and mature, and new challenges emerge, students will be able to use their honed observational skills and acquired foundational understanding of plants and habitat to problem solve. Encouraging more regenerative gardening practices locally, one garden at a time, can knit together a larger, thriving, sustainable ecosystem in our region.

Recent research is revealing the health advantages of interacting with nature. Garden professionals are privileged to have nature as our workplace; we spend our workday immersed in the natural world and its systems. This work provides a safe, accessible place to reap the many physical and psychological benefits of being outdoors for both ourselves and our clients. Workforce training in sustainable landscaping and garden management creates access to a rewarding livelihood with a rich relationship to nature and a driving purpose to restore and protect our environment, initiating a valuable, far-reaching ripple effect that benefits workers, clients, and ecosystems alike.

Training Will Address:

- Restorative landscaping and gardening techniques: how to use organic, ecological, and sustainable horticulture practices and why it will require a lifetime of learning.
- Effects of climate change on all aspects of landscape gardening, land management, and horticulture: how to make gardens resilient through oncoming change.
- Recent trends in gardening, landscaping, and design: how they benefit the environment, ecosystems, and job seekers.
- Emerging careers in sustainable landscaping and garden management: how professionals can access a range of possibilities for employment, job creation, and business development.
- Reading the natural landscape: how to observe, interpret, value, and manage gardens to benefit the surrounding ecosystem.
- Opportunities for hands-on learning: how to improve skills by participating in key garden practices and observing sustainable landscaping in action at Native Gardens of Blue Hill.
- Working with native plants: how to identify, value, and use them in the garden by understanding the site and the native ecology.
- Protecting habitat: how to enhance the garden for thriving wildlife and understand realistically what this means.
- Building soil as the foundation of a healthy garden: how to treat it with respect and encourage accumulation of microbes and fungi as part of a resilient network.
- Using water responsibly: how to manage its movement and address erosion.
- Composting: how to make it and use it in the garden, eradicating the need for chemical fertilizers.
- Using Integrated Pest Management: how to encourage proliferation of beneficial insects and safely discourage harmful organisms.
- Controlling invasive plants and pests: how to detect and manage them responsibly and understanding why it is important to reduce their impact.
- Organic lawn care and lawn alternatives: how to change the way lawns are managed to create safe spaces for our families and wildlife, reduce resource use, and eliminate environmental degradation.
- Basic Botany: how to identify plants using resources that can be used on the job to further identification skills with practice.

- Pruning: how to beautify and improve the health of plants, understand how plants respond to pruning, and learn strategies for revitalizing, shaping, and impacting the bloom time of a plant.
- Work readiness: how to be prepared for work in sustainable landscaping while keeping yourself and coworkers safe.
- Measuring success in terms of social and environmental rewards vs. financial rewards: how to participate in social entrepreneurship by prioritizing novel applications in landscaping that have the potential to solve community-based problems and create positive changes for our culture and environment while growing job opportunities making financial and social gain no longer mutually exclusive.

Upon Completion of the Course:

- Students will receive a certificate of completion from KVCC.
- Students are entitled to sit for the NOFA Organic Land Care Certificate exam.
- Students will be eligible for an NGBH badge/certificate after completing one season of work in the field and demonstrating best gardening practices.
- Students who complete the NGBH badge/certificate will be added to a database of individuals who will be recommended by NGBH for work when landscape companies and/or homeowners seek gardeners.