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Wednesday, July 7, 2010

## Landscaper takes organic beyond the vegetable patch

Garrett Park man forgoes chemicals when working on lawns

by Alex Ruoff | Staff Writer



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Richard Bajana remembers when he started working as a landscaper more than 20 years ago; he hated being told to spray pesticide.

"I did not like it when I had to spray the chemicals," Bajana said. "It was not what I wanted to do. I wanted to let things grow naturally."

These days, he does not spray anything except water on the lawns around Garrett Park and Kensington where he works.

Bajana's organic landscaping service, Richard Landscaping LLC of Bethesda, is among a growing number of landscapers who forgo chemicals and work directly with the environment to create nearly self-sustaining gardens and lawns that aim to leave less of a "footprint" on the land.

Bajana is one of three landscapers in Maryland and Washington, D.C., certified by the Northeast Organic Farming Association, which started in Connecticut to promote organic gardening, said Kate Mendenhall, executive director of the organization. The other two landscapers are in Eastern Maryland.

"Organic farming has really been our focus," Mendenhall said. "It wasn't until home gardening became in higher demand that we started organic landscaping."

Mendenhall said her organization's turf management and organic land care training programs were instituted more than seven years ago, but have seen the majority of their participation in the past three years.

New York leads the country in Organic Land Care Professional accreditations with 108. Fewer than 500 people are accredited by NOFA in the U.S.

Bajana said since he started in 2003, the popularity of organic landscaping has grown. He said his client base has been expanding as more people gain interest in cutting back on their home's environmental footprint.

environmental footprint.

"In the past three years, it's been more and more and more," he said. "It's starting here."

Bajana declined to comment on what he charges for lawn care, but said the prices typically are above-average because his methods are more labor intensive.



Anthony Castellano/The Gazette  
 Richard Bajana discusses landscaping plans with designer Charlotte Taylor on June 21 in a client's yard in Garrett Park.

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"It's harder to be organic, but it's better," he said.

The system Bajana and his crew of five employ differs from most residential landscapers in a number of ways, from the tools he uses to what he plants to how he plants them.

Bajana said he first aims to see what kinds of plants a property can naturally grow by looking beyond pH levels and seeing what kinds of microorganisms exist in the soil to determine what is appropriate for a specific property.

"We don't try to impose plans on your property or grow something that doesn't want to be there," he said. "We want to grow what will be there naturally."

In addition to reducing the use of chemical and pesticide, organic landscaping focuses on improving drainage to make better use of water resources, using a variety of plants to keep the area lush and green, and maintaining natural plant cycles, Bajana said.

"Richard loves to use water elements like dry stone creeks, rain gardens to keep water in and let nature do what it is supposed to do: grow," said Parkwood's Charlotte Taylor, one of Bajana's earliest clients who works with him on marketing and management. "There's more to the impact of your lawn than most people realize."

Taylor said they have designed and managed more than a dozen properties from Garrett Park and Kensington to Potomac.

While the popularity of organic landscaping is relatively new, its methods are not, Bajana said.

"These are techniques that have been around for a long time, it's just now that people are asking for it," he said.

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