

# The Washington Post

## Organic goes beyond the vegetable patch

By Alex Ruoff

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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 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 meant to leave less of a "footprint" on the land.

Bajana is one of three landscapers in Maryland and the District certified by the Northeast Organic Farming Association, which started in Connecticut to promote organic gardening, said Kate Mendenhall, the group's executive director. The other two landscapers are in Towson and Cecil County.

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

She 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 in the United States are accredited by NOFA.

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

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

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

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

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