



NATURAL *Beauty*

HOW GUARDIANSHIP OF THE LAND GUIDES THE EXPERTS AT NORTHWIND PERENNIAL FARM

By Lesa Knollenberg

A short drive north of Lake Geneva and west of Burlington, a picturesque view awaits. Nestled in a rustic farm setting on a 19th Century dairy farm, Northwind Perennial Farm houses over 300 species of perennials, shrubs, native plants and ornamental grasses, many of which are available for sale in the garden shop and nursery. The farm also offers landscape design services and makes its gorgeous grounds available for weddings and other group gatherings.



ABOVE: In the secret garden at Northwind Perennial Farm, Steve Coster, the Hardscape and Woody Tree Expert has created a stacked stone pyramid. Complementing the almost sculpture-like piece are the following grasses: *Sesleria Autumnalis*, more commonly known as autumn moor grass and *Sporobolus Heterolepsis* known as prairie dropseed. Accent plants include *Echinacea Tennesseeensis* or purple cone flower and *Coriopsis Palmata* known as tickseed.

Founded in 1991, Northwind Perennial Farm is co-owned by three friends and business partners. Colleen Garrigan, Steve Coster and Roy Diblik share a sense of responsibility to carefully curate the land. After purchasing the old farmstead property, they agreed to focus on sustainability and aesthetic integrity. They also resolved to maintain the property's unique connection to the past. Using the natural landscape, they created home-spun display areas: a meadow garden, arbor, pond, chicken coop, picket fence garden, woodland garden and fountains.

COMBINED EXPERTISE FOR UNIQUE RESULTS

All three friends share a similar mindset, but they each have an area of specialty. Garrigan runs the garden shop, which showcases both her flair for florals and her extensive antique collection. The garden shop is housed in the farm's dairy barn, with an entry through the original milk house. Garrigan's expertise is evident in floral arrangements with fresh-cut perennials and grasses, home décor displays and charming vintage inspiration. At the holidays, Garrigan and her design

staff inspire shoppers with decorating ideas among the fresh greens, wreaths, garland, berries and branches.

Coster is a Hardscape and Woody Tree and Shrub expert. Using locally sourced, natural materials, he designs walkways and border garden walls with artistic interest. A walk through Northwind's gravel garden highlights one of Coster's creations, a dry, stone-filled creek dotted with perennials. In the Secret Garden,

Coster has fashioned a stacked stone pyramid. For weddings and special occasions, he created a dance floor using architectural salvage and natural stone.

Diblik is a nationally-recognized perennial plant expert, grower, designer, speaker and author. Combining his 35 years of knowledge growing traditional and Midwest-native perennials, he specializes in highly aesthetic, sustainable plant communities for all seasons, while reducing





TOP: Complementary plants that thrive together, grow as a community and contribute to their own health is the essence of Roy Diblik's Know Maintenance™ approach to creating perennial gardens. Shown above are Amsonia Blue Ice or bluestar and Allium Schreubianum, known as dwarf chives. Bottom: Liatris Spicata, known as blazing star or prairie gay feather, the smoky grass is Deschampsia Cespitosa Goldtau or golden dew tufted hair grass. The yellow blooms in the middle are Hemerocallis Alba or daylily.

garden maintenance through design.

KNOW YOUR PLANTS

Diblik is also the creator of the Know Maintenance™ approach, which advocates the concept of gardens consisting of complementary plants that thrive together, grow as a community and contribute to their own health. Diblik's book, *The Know*

Maintenance™ Perennial Garden, is a guide based upon his belief that it is easier to create a garden if you know your plants. He believes that gardens should be thoughtful, ecologically directed, emotionally out-reaching and yet very personal. He enjoys educating both beginning and experienced gardeners about this philosophy.

Diblik has been selecting attention-grabbing perennials for Northwind for years. In the 1980s he found a stunning switchgrass near a railroad track, which he trademarked and named Panicum Northwind. This year, the Perennial Plant Association has named the Northwind — a warm-season perennial grass with blue-green foliage that stands taller and more erect than most of its species — the perennial plant of the year. This switchgrass is a perfect tribute to the stalwart stewardship of Northwind's founders.

PLANT SELECTION CRITERIA

With new varieties of perennials developed and introduced every year, Diblik makes a careful selection for Northwind: anything he selects must be hardy in zone 5, which any gardener worth his compost knows is crucial in Wisconsin's inconsistent winters. They also must be disease-resistant and low maintenance. Northwind's staff is knowledgeable about when to divide and/or transplant perennials, and they're happy to advise growers on how to create a garden with seasonal interest with perennials that bloom at varying times during the growing season





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so the flower bed is filled with continuous blooms.

The founders are very passionate about sustainability and education. In keeping with their desire to meld the community's landscaping with the natural world, Northwind Perennial Farm partnered with the Geneva Lake Conservancy's Shoreline Buffer Campaign.

ECO-FRIENDLY LANDSCAPES

According to Samantha Carlson, landscape designer for Northwind, "the goal of this project is to help lakeshore home owners manage and maintain the ecologically sensitive areas. They can and should be full of a rich diversity of plants, animals, and microorganisms, including humans. It is critical to keep this land healthy as it is the entryway to our valuable waterways. The model plantings we created for these residences are designed to contribute to special ecosystem services one would find in an undisturbed setting — shoreline erosion control, filtering of storm water runoff and pollutants, as well as habitat for wildlife. The resources and references available to residents can be intimidating . . . With the simple grid patterns we illustrated and provided residents, they have something they can take on themselves."

With a Master's degree in Landscape Architecture from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and research focused on small-scale sustainable agriculture systems and ecological design, Carlson is a perfect fit for Northwind. She was drawn to employment at Northwind because of their design-focused guardianship of the land. She also jumped at the chance to work with Diblik. "I feel extremely fortunate to be practicing under and learning from one of the best plantsmen in the Midwest," she says.

Northwind has extended its eco-friendly protocol to residential landscaping as well. A drive around the Lake Geneva area showcases some of their most interesting landscaping projects. The Northwind team designs, builds and maintains gardens, patios, walks, walls and ponds for residential, commercial and public spaces. But true to form, their residential landscaping projects have an environmental base, as well.



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As with most projects, residential landscaping at Northwind begins with a vision. A landscape designer such as Carlson visits the property, and walks clients through the design process, from concepts to installation.

All projects employ Diblik's Know Maintenance™ approach, which combines progressive planting methods, regionally dependable perennials and a customized maintenance plan. "We create compositions that are inspired by nature and thoughtfully choreographed and tailored to site conditions," explains Carlson. "Our gardens have season-long moments of color that are enhanced by diverse textures of native grasses and sedges."

TWO-STEP MAINTENANCE APPROACH

Projects designed by Northwind Perennial Farm have long-term interests at heart. There are two crucial maturity markers to bolster the growth of the design, which require maintenance by the resident. (Maintenance may also be managed by Northwind.)

The first stage of the approach requires nurturing, typically done during the first two years. It focuses on pursuing the weed seeds that germinate between the developing perennials, especially from early May until mid-June. The perennials themselves have no foliage yet, so sunlight germinates all plant growth, including weeds. Northwind advises weeding about once every two weeks for the first two years of the young garden.

The next stage, year three and beyond, is known as the establishing state. This is the payoff. After a successful nurturing stage, the perennials will fill in and create a closed community. By late June, the perennials should be tight enough that hoeing is no longer required. Diblik has coined the phrase "observational weeding," to explain the maintenance that is necessary during the establishing state. If small weeds happen to germinate and grow next to the crown of a perennial, they are pulled by hand. Gardeners can expect observational weeding to take place every 20 days or so.

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HIGH-PROFILE PROJECTS

With Diblik's thorough understanding of gardening, it is no wonder he has also made a name for himself in the arena of landscape design, of which he has proved to be a true innovator. Since traditional landscaping has changed very little over the last 50 years, Diblik is helping set precedence for contemporary planting design. His work is featured at several high-profile locations throughout the region. For example, he was instrumental in designing the entrance to the Mitchell Park Domes in the Milwaukee area. The conservatory set out to create a garden that needed little maintenance and didn't require the use of annuals. Diblik's approach crafted an entrance space with mature perennials that have textural and colorful changes for each subsequent trip by visitors.

Closer to home, Grand Geneva Resort and Spa utilized Diblik's creativity to combine their focus on luxury with function. As guests move between the spa and the hotel, Grand Geneva wanted to extend the feeling of relaxation and restoration which was cultivated at the spa. Diblik transformed what was once an 8,500-square-foot area of turf (which required mowing 29 times a season) to a garden with purpose. During the blooming months, the area is now alive with colorful perennials. During the winter, seed heads and grass blooms create a winter interest paralleling restoration, as well.

In the Chicago area, Diblik worked with The Art Institute of Chicago to mirror the excitement of the new Modern Wing with four plantings, inspired by the diverse art and artists found within. He also designed plantings near the new Oceanarium at the Shedd Aquarium and is involved with redefining the herbaceous plantings at Navy Pier.

At Northwind Perennial Farm, the talented team of Diblik, Carrigan, Coster, and their staff have created a sanctuary within reach. "We love this area, the rolling hills and the wonderful natural resource of clean water. We enjoy sharing our knowledge and passion for the art of gardening with all of you that live in this unique place." 🌱

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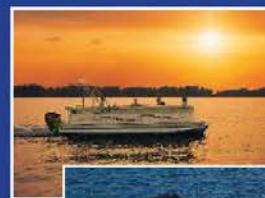
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