



# WET, WILD & CANADIAN

THE HARROWSMITH GARDEN AT CANADA BLOOMS  
SHOWS HOW BEAUTIFUL THE RESULTS CAN BE WHEN YOU  
PLANT WITH THE ENVIRONMENT IN MIND

*By Nancy Payne*



## Visitors to the “Wet, Wild and Canadian” Harrowsmith display garden at this year’s Canada Blooms show, an extravaganza of garden design in Toronto, could have been forgiven for thinking they’d wandered into an especially beautiful corner of the Canadian Shield.

We made sure our corner of the nation’s biggest garden show reflected the Harrowsmith ethos, meaning it wasn’t your typical, predictable landscape—but then, you probably expected that from us. Instead of the usual geometric, perfectly aligned assortment of bright blossoms from all over the planet, visitors were greeted by what we like to think of as a truly Canadian garden.

“It represents an untouched area left to go wild,” said the garden’s designer, Joe Genovese of the Toronto-area landscape design firm Genoscape Landscaping and Design. With its rugged rocks, homegrown plants and natural mulches, the garden was in keeping with the theme of the 2014 edition of Canada Blooms: ‘Wild!’

“We chose Genoscape’s design for its originality, and the way it highlights biodiversity and natural elements. Using rocks and rugged textures created a relaxed ‘wild’ look, which is in keeping with the look of a landscape that’s familiar to Canadians everywhere,” said

Yolanda Thornton, publisher of Harrowsmith’s Truly Canadian Almanac.

At the centre of the Wet, Wild and Canadian Harrowsmith Garden lay not orchids or roses but a pond. A big pond. Measuring 40 feet by 25 feet (12.2 by 7.6 m), the water feature wasn’t the familiar murky puddle inhabited by a few listless koi. Rather, it reflected Genovese’s preferred approach, which is to create a sustainable ecosystem—a wetland, not just an artificial pool.

That focus on water as an integral part of nature, not just a decoration, was another reason his design fit the Harrowsmith approach, even in the middle of a huge urban centre. “It might surprise many to learn that streams and creeks are everywhere under the pavement in our cities. Including water, plants, fish, rocks and other natural approaches instead of chemicals made this garden a good fit for us. Plus, the calming element of water added a touch of horticulture therapy that’s meditative and appealing to the senses,” said Thornton.



*Genovese's early rendering for the Canada Blooms Garden.*

Genovese has what he calls “a passion for water,” which explains why he didn’t stop at the pond: the Harrowsmith garden also contained three waterfalls and some smaller ponds, too. Although he does all kinds of landscape design projects, he especially loves those involving water. Even as a boy, he loved to spend time trying to create waterfalls for his mother.

His devotion to designing natural water features has won him some clients who know their stuff. Garden guru Mark Cullen encountered Genovese while checking out a water feature at a home show. After Cullen peppered him with questions about a pond he wasn’t happy with, Genovese offered to visit to see what the problem was.

Cullen was so impressed with Genovese’s analysis that he hired him to redo the pond completely. The result was a waterfall and pond Cullen says he’s still delighted with. “Making sure that the water in a pond and waterfall is well balanced requires a lot of experience and skill,” said Cullen. “While lots of professional landscapers claim to know the natural chemistry of a successful water feature, few actually do, especially where maintaining an environment for healthy fish is concerned.”

## **JOE GENOVESE SHARES SOME EASY WAYS TO RESPECT AND CONNECT WITH NATURE IN YOUR GARDEN.**

**PLANT NATIVE SPECIES** Because they're adapted to our climate, they will thrive while requiring less watering. Bonus: They're often less expensive than non-native varieties.

**HARVEST THE RAIN** Nature provides the water, so why not take advantage of it for water features, irrigation, even washing the car?

### **ELIMINATE UNNATURAL MATERIALS FROM YOUR SIGHTLINES**

The idea is to create the feeling of being immersed in nature, so try to avoid plastics in your landscape. Use wood furniture and accessories instead. If you must use some synthetic elements, mask them with rock, wood chips or native ground covers.

**PLANT FOR WILDLIFE** Choose flowers and shrubs, such as lavender, serviceberry and butterfly weed, that attract bees, birds and butterflies. You'll be rewarded with the sights and sounds of these pollinators and song singers.

**INSTALL PERMEABLE SURFACES** Sand, rock and other natural substances on patios and walkways help control excessive water runoff while encouraging deep root watering for surrounding plants.

**USE NON-QUARRIED ROCK WHEN POSSIBLE** Glacial granite, quartz, pyrite—every area of Canada has beautiful natural stones in all shapes and sizes, making them an ideal choice for landscape rock throughout your garden.

**INSTALL AN ECOSYSTEM POND** Many water features require chemicals and a lot of energy. A self-sustaining, low-maintenance ecosystem pond, on the other hand, uses the bare minimum of electricity to keep the pond aerated, and is a source of life for many backyard visitors.

**CONSTRUCT A WETLAND FILTER** Like a natural wetland, constructed wetlands clean the water using plants and beneficial bacteria.

**ADD SOME FISH** What is more peaceful than sitting by a pond watching your fish swim around? Creating caves and tunnels will allow the fish to hide from predators.

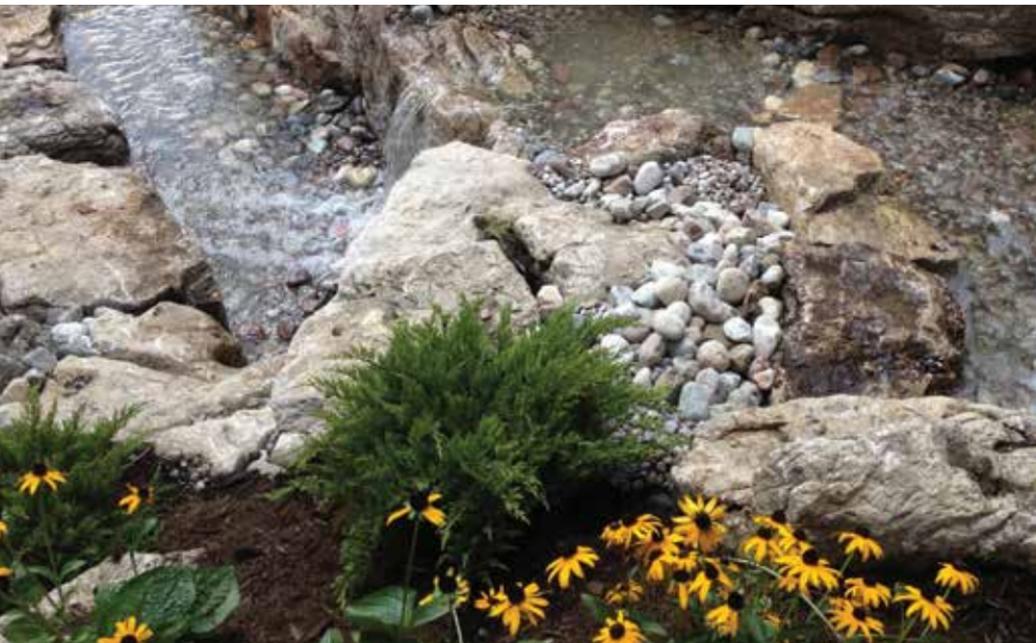
**INSTALL LOW-VOLTAGE LANDSCAPE LIGHTING** Energy-efficient lighting gives you peace of mind as you enjoy a whole new perspective on your backyard landscape after dark.

## “The calming element of water adds a touch of horticulture therapy that’s meditative and appealing to the senses”

– Harrowsmith’s Yolanda Thornton

Genoscape worked in collaboration with Aquascape Designs to create a wetland feature for the flamingo habitat at the highly regarded Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago, one of Genovese’s favourite projects. Genovese also works with clients and other companies across the country on a consultative basis, where he assists in the design and construction of water features. But he’s almost as proud of the property in downtown Toronto that he took from a tennis court to a haven of natural beauty. “The owner said, ‘I want a pond—no, I want a lake in my backyard,’” said Genovese, who obliged with a design that included rainwater harvesting, something he says anyone can set up.

But focusing on water by itself wouldn’t have been enough to catch the eye of the decision makers at Harrowsmith, where harmony with local ecosystems has always been front and centre. “Incorporating the use of native plants and trees encourages birds, butterflies and bees to the garden. It’s a way of doing things that is very much in keeping with the Harrowsmith philosophy,” said Thornton, “and it’s important because rapid development threatens Canada’s natural habitats.”



It's relatively easy, Genovese noted, to do things using long-standing plants and methods. "It's way more challenging to mimic nature," he said, "but gardening that way is my personal preference. To complete a project that looks natural is very rewarding."

When he's planning a backyard or garden, he looks at the surrounding rocks, what kinds of plants naturally grow where in the surrounding area, and how the natural waterways run.

Genovese has to balance his natural approach with realism about the constraints of the short Canadian gardening season, though; even his showpiece wild garden had some hydrangeas and rhododendrons for colour and Boston ferns to provide out-of-season greenery. The point is to work with native plants and naturally occurring elements such as local rock as much as possible. And that's definitely something anyone can tackle.



## THE BATEMAN CONNECTION

**THE BATEMAN FOREST TRAIL CONNECTS HARROWSMITH'S WETLAND GARDEN AND CANADA'S FAVOURITE WILDLIFE ARTIST.**

Robert Bateman, who displays his passion for our natural world in his foreword to this edition of the Harrowsmith Truly Canadian Almanac, has spent his life capturing wildlife on canvas and advocating for our wild spaces. In recent years, he's turned his attention to helping young people learn about—and learn to love—nature. So it's not surprising he lent his name to a trail at Canada Blooms that wound through trees, stumps, log carvings and more.

The Bateman Forest Trail was created by Bienenstock, a company specializing in playgrounds and parks that help children and others in the community to explore and enjoy their local environment. The trail linked the Wet, Wild and Canadian Harrowsmith Garden to another nearby display focused on the show's Wild! theme.

For the Canada Blooms garden, Genovese pointed out, “We started with a flat space on a concrete floor, so if we can make a natural garden there, anyone can make one anywhere.” By thinking twice about loading up with the same old nursery plants, you can save yourself a lot of time and effort, since native species require almost no care once they’ve settled in. “They’re way less maintenance, and they don’t require irrigation.”

Then there’s the satisfaction of knowing you’re providing habitat for creatures such as toads and food for butterflies and birds. “Connecting with nature is going to be much more rewarding than fighting it,” said Genovese. Keep an eye out for species such as black-eyed Susans, coneflower, Joe-pye weed, winterberry, dogwood, native anemones and columbines—no matter where you are, there are tough species that can take whatever the local climate throws at them.

If you prefer delicate foreign hybrids that need to be babied, well, as he points out, “There’s a lot of maintenance involved with something like that. If that’s your thing, no problem.” But on the other hand, if you want a low-maintenance garden that reflects its surroundings, there are more options than ever before to connect your yard with nature.

The whole point of the Harrowsmith garden, said Thornton, was to help visitors accustomed to expanses of exotic foliage and blooms to start to think a little different. “We wanted visitors to walk away inspired and better informed about creating natural gardens this year—to think of beneficial native plants and trees, not just pretty flowers.”

It’s not everyone’s cup of tea, of course. To some, a natural garden looks like an untamed patch of weeds. Although more clients are requesting he use natural techniques, even Genovese acknowledged that many still prefer a more orderly, geometric approach to landscaping, reflecting trends in interior design. “The outside is the outside,” he added, “and I think it should look like it. You want to work with Mother Nature, not against her.”

*Nancy Payne is a freelance writer and editor who lives in the country near Lindsay, Ontario, with her husband and two sons.*

*Check out some of Joe Genovese’s work and learn more about his philosophy at [www.genoscape.ca](http://www.genoscape.ca). Even the company’s logo reflects a harmonious, natural approach to landscape design.*



“Connecting with nature is going to be much more rewarding than fighting it. You want to work with Mother Nature, not against her”

– *The Harrowsmith Garden's designer, Joe Genovese*



## CANADA BLOOMS

### SUMMER COMES EARLY AT THIS GARDENER'S PARADISE

It was like water in the desert—or, rather, lilacs in a snowbank—for winter-weary gardeners. In 1997, the Garden Club of Toronto and Landscape Ontario teamed up to put on the first-ever Canada Blooms show, a celebration of flowers, gardens and those who care for them, drawing 70,000 visitors over its five days.

Now located at the Direct Energy Centre in Toronto's Exhibition Place, Canada Blooms takes place in mid-March, just as even the most optimistic Canadians start to wonder if spring will ever arrive. (Residents of B.C.'s lower mainland, please stop smirking.) Their love of gardening and desire to see something fresh and green brought more than 200,000 people to the most recent show.

Here at Harrowsmith's Truly Canadian Almanac, we know how much you love learning about gardening, especially environmentally friendly gardening, which is why we were proud to be a media sponsor of the 2014 Canada Blooms—and to help create the beautiful, natural Harrowsmith garden pictured on these pages.