

Granville Goes Organic

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Mainland Landscaping & Gardening Ltd. maintains Granville Island's many properties, including Ron Basford Park and Duck Pond (pictured here). The company subscribes wholly to the Organic Land Care Standards of the Society for Organic Urban Land Care (SOUL)

When Mainland Landscaping & Gardening Ltd. introduced Integrated Pest Management to Granville Island in 1989, Martin Harcourt launched a decades-long pursuit of chemical-free landscapes. It wasn't until 1993 that B.C. and the rest of Canada caught on to the IPM movement; by then, Mainland had become the first company in Canada to use reared insect predators in commercial landscaping, and Harcourt had given the keynote address at the country's first IPM conference. He'd moved away from using treated lumber and toward recycling all waste from Mainland's operations. His continuing efforts culminated this past season when the company went all-organic on Granville Island.

The island being the most heavily traveled tourist destination in Vancouver, Mainland staff were a little concerned about the outcomes, particularly with regard to turf areas that suffer trampling from 12 million visitors each season. Said Kendra Hope of their efforts, "We actually saw improvements to the grass as well: it is now softer, healthier, and the grass is out-competing the weeds. We are convinced that if we can make Granville Island a success with organics, then anyone can do this, anywhere!"

Harcourt explains, "The single most sustainable thing we do is to not use chemicals in the soil. Composting and mulching grass and leaves, plus the addition of pro-organic bacteria and enzymes that we grow on site, increases bioactivity and decomposes thatch and leaf mulch. This not only traps carbon in the soil, but also increases biodiversity and sustainability of the landscape soil ecosystem."

Mainland's organic feeding consists of liquid and solid certified organic fertilizers, and the application of microorganisms (E.M., compost tea, mycorrhizal fungi), which help plants absorb nutrients and defend themselves from pests. With a basic understanding of plant health care and soil ecosystems, pest problems are managed by prevention rather than cure.

“The environment has become an operations-wide consideration for Granville Island,” comments Ken Tunnicliffe, Manager of Operations, indicating that the island will soon be hosting a charrette to find ways green technologies can be used to improve building functions. Says Tunnicliffe, “We’re also working with Smithrite to develop a compost program to remove our landscape, market and restaurant wastes from the disposal chain; economically it could become a benefit too since it doesn’t really make sense to cart it away, and then bring it back as compost. Granville Island made it a point some years ago to become pesticide-free, and Mainland really took the initiative not only to partner with us in that objective, but to go a step further. The organics program fits the island’s image of reuse and recycling, and it’s an important factor for our visitors.”