

# Learning with Dirty Hands



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Canadian high school students partner with industry for ambitious School Greening Project

The students at St. James Catholic High School, in Guelph, Ont., Canada learned a lot about sustaining their school-yard environment, and a little about working as a landscape pro, thanks to the efforts and generosity of Landscape Ontario.

Joined by 42 companies donating their time, materials and resources – valued at over \$60,000 – 120 boys and girls lent a hand doing what project co-manager, Don Prosser of Don Prosser Landscape Design, Inc., describes as, "Shoveling, carrying, pushing and raking 62 cubic yards of mulch!" And, coming away from the project with a deeper appreciation of what goes into sustaining their environment, and, perhaps, a little additional respect for the landscape profession.



Student "Green Team" members helped transform a space formerly occupied by portable classrooms into a sustainable outdoor green space.

IMAGES COURTESY OF LANDSCAPE ONTARIO AND ST. JAMES CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL.

Landscape Ontario (LO) is a trade association representing more than 2,000 landscape professionals in Ontario. In the past, the Waterloo Chapter has been active in its region, volunteering time and materials on Earth Day each year.

"The Waterloo Chapter of Landscape Ontario used to donate trees and decorative rocks for neighborhood schools each year on Earth Day, plus we would do other small projects as opportunities arose," says Thomas Blatter, Dreamestate Landscaping, Guelph, Ontario, co-project manager. "In 2010, we decided to combine our efforts (and budget) and select a school each year to do projects on a larger scale."

Dubbed the “School Greening Project,” schools must design and plan a sustainable area on their campuses and compete against other community schools for earning the award. St. James was one of 10 schools that applied for the 2012 grant.

## **“Green for Life” guidelines**

L0 operates under the parameters of what they term their “Green for Life” philosophy. Among its tenets are: increased biodiversity through the use of native plantings; a rainwater harvesting system that makes a site self-sustaining for water use; permeable paving and gravel paths to enhance infiltration of water into the water table and to reduce runoff; use of recycled materials (aggregate); and access to key parts of the site for those with mobility challenges.



About 120 high school students at the St. James Catholic High School in Guelph, Ont., Canada, shoveled, carried, pushed and raked 63 cubic yards of mulch to “green” their campus.

A key feature of the project is the Aquascape Rainwater Harvesting Storage System consisting of a rain filter, modular storage basin, pump and irrigation system allowing for a sustainable watering system within the project area. Rainwater collected from the school’s roof and stored in a 2,000-gallon underground cistern should prove adequate insurance against flooding of the area, as well as providing water, replete with needed nutrients, for the greenhouse and plantings.

Likewise, the 1,600-square-foot permeable pavers are an ideal selection, allowing the water runoff to be contained and seep below to reach groundwater after being cleansed by layers of applied soil and gravel.

Sustainable plantings encourage prosperous growth with little additional watering, or application of fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides.

The greenhouse includes the water harvesting system, which was crafted by students in the Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) Home Build program. The new greenhouse will provide science students and culinary classes materials to use by sustaining their organic needs.

The winning design focused on dramatically improving an area that had housed portable classrooms, which were scheduled for demolition. The faculty and students saw an opportunity to create an outdoor classroom/green space and greenhouse in that particular space.

Excavation included stripping the top 6 inches of soil, grading to a 12-inch depth around the edge of the 20-by-30-foot greenhouse slab and introducing 950 square feet of pathways. Total fill moved away from the site was 265 yards.

L0 begins the selection process January each year with submitted written proposals. A panel of judges reviews the plans and selects finalists to present in front of the panel, who then select the winning school.



After the project was completed, participating educators, landscape pros, suppliers and other volunteers gathered one last time for a “team picture” to celebrate a job well done.

“We also visit each submitting school to provide support and ‘coaching,’” says Blatter. “We’re looking for schools that demonstrate a commitment for environmental stewardship, education and community involvement; we like to see involvement from not only teachers, but students, administration and parents. This year is unique because of the winning school’s student involvement. Teachers and other faculty at winning schools in previous years led the projects.”

## **Students take charge**

“The Landscape Ontario Waterloo Chapter’s School Greening Project creates an outdoor space that’s conducive to learning and reflection, including an outdoor classroom and quiet seating area. The design concept and the presentation to our Waterloo Chapter was solely an initiative of the students belonging to the St. James Catholic High School’s Green Team,” Blatter adds.

Green Team students shared their vision with their environmental teacher, Mrs. I. Doyle, who created a project for her class to survey and sample the area (soil, moisture, shelter, shade, etc.) and develop a blueprint for an Outdoor Classroom/Greenspace. The design they presented was based on ideas developed by Peter Clarke and Mytchel Lynn, which included several trees for shade, bench seating, a spiral walking path, clusters of armour stones for additional seating, and many native plant species.

“On behalf of the administration at St. James, we want to congratulate the students from our Green Team and our teacher leaders, Mrs. Musselman and Mrs. Zonneveld,” says St. James Principal Tim Yawney. “Congratulations on initiating the idea, creating the dynamic presentation, winning the award and establishing a long-term sustainable green space. To Landscape Ontario and all of their partners, your generosity and commitment to caring for our environment will impact generations of St. James students. Our school is dedicated to environmental sustainability. Our students will benefit from the education this space will provide and the peace and quiet from their busy days.”



The sustainable St. James landscape project was a huge success for promoting the benefits of a sustainable future for these students, and a chance for landscape pros to demonstrate how they can help to shape a better environment for everyone.

In addition to the donated Gro-Bulk mulch, materials were assigned at no cost by: McKenzie Brothers, providing clean fill for the site; Adams Landscape Supply, 88 cubic yards of mixed soil; Creative Landscape Depot, 1 ton flagstone; Dufferin Aggregates, 22 cubic yards of .75-inch clear stone; Guelph Building Supply, contributed sand, fittings, tile and geotextile;

Helmutz Landscape and Interlock, three bundles of pavers; Lafarge, 22 cubic yards recycled gravel; Lockhart's Excavation, 22 cubic yards of 2-inch crushed stone; Native Plant Source, native shrubs; Royal City Nursery, planting, grading four serviceberry clump trees, and pots for transplanting; SnapEdge, 200 feet of permeable edge restraint; St. Jacob's Country Gardens, two high-bush cranberry, two hemlock and one dogwood; Steed and Evans, 12 cubic yards of 3/16-inch chip; Stone Place, one bundle cobble-TNT; Property Maintenance, added perennials and grasses. In addition, Oaks Pavers and Walls supplied 800 square feet of permeable pavers at a reduced cost, as did The Landscape Centre, offering a discounted granite bridge.

Donated equipment included: Coleman Equipment, supplying four weeks of a skid steer and three weeks of a roller and tamper; Connect Equipment, making available two weeks of a loader, mini-excavator and post labor; and SMS Rents, a mini-excavator for a day.

The volunteers are too many to mention here, but were all members of the L0 Waterloo Chapter, adds Blatter, "A special mention should be made to a few guys who, in addition to working on this project during their employers/company time, volunteered additional hours to the project during their own time: Olaf Stoll and Gavin Hanna from Dreamestate Landscaping; Gerry Turple, Dustin Compton and Jason Rice from Platinum Stone Design; and Adam from Ace Lawn Care and Curtis from Landscape Plus. These guys went way above and beyond the call."

Dignitaries at this past fall's ribbon cutting included Landscape Ontario executive director, Tony DiGiovanni, and Guelph Mayor Karen Farbridge.

Dillon March, student leader of the green team, puts the community volunteerism into perspective: "I am extremely proud of my fellow students, our Green Team members, our wonderful faculty advisers, our school administration, the support of the St. James community and the generosity of Landscape Ontario; each of these played a key role in the creation, development and construction of this project."

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