

# NORTHWEST LANDSCAPE PROFESSIONAL

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*Be The Trend You Want To See In The World*

## Our Impact On The Environment

*By Hendrikus Schraven, President / Trail Blazer, Hendrikus Group*

It's not about the trends we follow; it's about the trends we make.

And there is a trend percolating in the landscape, construction, and design field that is finally, slowly but surely, coming to everyone's attention. Perspectives are changing, and it is time to not only embrace that change, but to help lead it.

More and more clients are requesting a safer approach. That safe approach means an organic one, where their children can play on the lawn and in the parks without being poisoned by pesticides and chemical fertilizers.

People are becoming aware that these pesticides and chemicals are penetrating our subsurface water and running off into our creeks, lakes, ponds, rivers, and oceans.

There is a domino effect to all of this. Our marine life is being poisoned, and we, in turn, consume these fish that are laden with toxic chemicals. A large portion of the commercial food grown is GMO – which, on top of the controversial ill effects of genetic manipulation, it also means those crops are heavily laden with pesticides.

Seventy percent of Americans have at least one chronic disease they are suffering from. Our lifestyles have succumbed to a chemically laden world. The toxicity in our environment, to which the Landscape Industry has played its part, has had ill effects on human health.

It is time for us to make the trends, not be following. It is up to us – aware of the impact our actions have on our land, waterways, and human health – to educate the public. Being in the landscape profession, makes us stewards of the land, to protect nature from pillage and destruction.

### Look At Every Aspect Of What We Do In Our Profession

It is time to look at every single aspect of what we do in our profession: The construction aspects, the erosion aspects, the water purification aspects, the health aspects, and the overall harmony of the landscape. Everything is interconnected. There is no such thing as a separation one from the other.

When we create a garden, we have the opportunity to connect our clients to nature, and that garden should be as close to nature as we can get. When your perspective sees the interconnectedness – from the rocks you set, the hardscapes you create, the soil you install, the trees and shrubs you plant, and the bees that cross-pollinate them, you see that everything has a life factor to it, it's own living energy. Everything in nature harmonizes. Everything. There are no exclu-

sions. We can bring that interconnectedness and that life to our clients and our projects.

When you walk into the forest, you're looking at soils that have taken thousands of years for nature to establish. But we can literally destroy them in a single day with heavy equipment, totally annihilating them, without a second thought. And we do this with total and often unconscious disrespect for the animal habitat, our environment, or what we have done by sending the problem of runoff erosion with all its pesticides downstream. It is time for a paradigm shift away from the devastating cycle that is ever so present in landscape and construction, and for us to lead the way.



We should be questioning the trends we follow and the installations that we do by first looking at nature and the profile of soils, the percolation and the biology, and how to mimic and put that into our projects “

### Standard Practice

Construction begins and the delicate topsoil that nature has taken hundreds or thousands of years to create is stripped away with initial excavation. When the landscape professional comes in, he all too often adds a couple of inches of (usually not so good) topsoil on top of the hard pan left by construction, jackhammers some holes for the trees, deposits the plants, adds some fertilizer, and calls it good.

That land has just been brought back to the ice age when no soil was present. And what happens in the ice age? Nature grows all types of weeds to break down that hard glacier tilled layer, the hardpan. Weeds all have a job to do, and a reason for being where they are, be it to break down hard pan, bring minerals to the surface, restore nitrogen – they all have a purpose.

So when you create an ice age scenario, you will get weeds that act to break that soil open and put organic matter in so it can slowly have a progression back to the evergreen forest. Nature is always trying to restore balance and needs to be seen in that light if we are going to work in harmony with our environment.

### Work To Restore Harmony That Nature Seeks

Rather than seeing the story weeds are telling us and working to

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*Griffith Slab Bridge: Transformation of a gully into a naturalized rock-lined creek that provides ideal salmon spawning habitat – Mercer Island, Washington.*



*Lake & Wetlands Construction: Creation of a natural wetlands habitat and man-made lake using natural and organic materials.*



*Lake & Wetlands Completion: Thriving wetlands habitat, well established and performing as nature herself created it, in just 8 months.*

restore that harmony that nature seeks, we scream. “No, we can’t have those weeds!” So we come up with pesticides, like the Round-Ups with the cancer-causing glyphosates, and we spray it because we want to make our clients happy because they don’t want any weeds.

Instead, we should be questioning the trends we follow and the installations that we do by first looking at nature and the profile of soils, the percolation and the biology, and how to mimic and put that into our projects. Our soils are a living carpet full of microorganisms that are essential to life on this planet. Healthy soil is a filter for our water, a matrix that prevents erosion and holds moisture, and a storehouse for our nutrition. High nutritional foods can only happen from a fertile balanced soil. A handful of healthy soil contains more microorganisms than there are people on this planet. Without this microbiology, soil is dead, and lifeless soil promotes disease.

By understanding how nature works, we won’t have those particular weeds that are needed to break open the ice age soils, and then we won’t need to use the pesticides that are poisoning our environment. Wrong practices bring wrong results.

Our society has created a compartmentalized mind-set where one hand does not know what the other is doing, or the impact from either, and has removed us from understanding nature. It is time to look at all the parts and start combining again, to get back in touch with the interconnectedness of how nature and life works. To be a people from the earth, for the earth, and with the earth.

A saying I am fond of using frequently is, “When nature and the book disagree ... throw away the book.” I say this because nature knows better. We should be listening to her, like the many ancient cultures before us – and respect the land, the animal kingdoms, the water, and the marine life. Those cultures better understood that when they took from the land, they needed to give back to the land, therefore, sustaining nature’s ability to provide abundance.

Let us be the trendsetters and not the trend followers; be part of the solution and lead others to do the same. We, as the landscape profession, can be looked upon as taking the bull by the horns and changing the modus operandi. We cannot say our clients cannot afford to do it right – doing it right is the least expensive in the long run. We become responsible for our impact on the environment, and we take the care to educate our clients so they too understand the benefits of working with nature, not against her.

When we wage war against our planet, we wage war against ourselves. Let’s change the paradigm ... and be trendsetters.

*Hendrikus Schraven’s European background in agriculture and construction has given him a firm foundation in soil ecology, structural applications and design, and the role of organics in environmental health. In 1972, he made Seattle his home and has become one of the most respected, environmentally-conscious landscape construction and design companies in the world. He has garnered over 70 state, national, and international awards for environmental excellence and erosion control technology. Covering the topics of organics, living soils, environmentally sound construction practices, and erosion control, he has consulted all the way from Haiti, Fiji, Holland, China, and Europe to New York, California, Arizona, Alaska, Washington State, and Hawaii. Through his company, he supplies high-quality organic fertilizers, soil amendments and compost tea sprays, and equipment that have helped make his projects so environmentally successful. Please visit: [www.neofractallandscape.com](http://www.neofractallandscape.com), [www.hendrikus.com](http://www.hendrikus.com) and [www.hendrikusorganics.com](http://www.hendrikusorganics.com).*