

Landscaping – Hazardous to your life?

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Did you know that we are in the sixth mass extinction of life on earth? That means that all the critters that we are now familiar with may soon be gone forever from the earth. This scary revelation was brought home to me while watching a television show about the state of the world's wildlife. We are at a critical crossroad and it is up to us to choose which road we take.

The fifth extinction which happened 65 millions years ago is believed to have been caused by a meteorite that crashed into Earth causing the extinction of the dinosaurs and many other forms of life. That was the most recent major extinction. Unlike the other mass extinctions that have been caused by catastrophic natural disasters, this sixth extinction is being caused by us (human beings).

In our need for economic growth, housing, food, clothing and other resources, we are stripping the earth of its plants and animals. As we need more and more land and water to keep up with demand, critical wildlife habitat is being lost. In our urban world we are disconnected from nature and our true place within it. Chief Seattle, a very wise American Indian, once said: "All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself". I ask you, "What are we doing to our web?" Are we next?

Let's take a look at our landscapes. Is it sustainable, prudent, wise or respectful to take water from the wetlands, rivers, lakes and wildlife and use it to water landscapes that are not suited for our environment? Landscapes that will survive on the natural amount of rainfall are the prudent and sustainable answer. We need to change our thinking if we are to survive without causing a mass extinction. Conserving resources as much as possible is what we have to do. And that means a change in our mindset and our current standards.

There are many things we can do in our own landscapes that will help us to conserve resources. Planting trees that will shade the walls of our house will lower our need for electricity. Using mulch (especially oak leaves or pine needles from our own yards) will conserve water, reduce weeds, moderate soil temperature, improve the soil and release nutrients. Choosing native plants that restore lost habitat will help wildlife to survive. Choosing plants that are suited to the site and therefore don't need any extra water or fertilizer or pruning will conserve resources. Choosing to grow our own food on our property conserves energy.

It is all easy. We just have to do it. If each one of us will change, or modify our landscapes and energy choices, to conserve and restore resources, collectively we can make a huge difference. Each conserving yard, added to the next yard and the next will change the environment for the better. You, you are the answer, the solution. Each

person makes a difference. Choose your road wisely. Choose conservation and helping the earth. Make that change for the betterment of the world and yourself.

Learn more. Visit this website: <http://www.well.com/~davidu/extinction.html> or Google: sixth mass extinction. Visit <http://floridayards.org/> to learn more about resource conserving landscaping. Get your landscape recognized as Florida-friendly – visit: <http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu/FYN/floridayards.htm> Visit your local Extension Office.