

A man wearing a light blue t-shirt, dark shorts, and a baseball cap is walking along a narrow path through a lush, green forest. The path is covered in tall grass and wildflowers. Sunlight filters through the dense canopy of trees, creating a dappled light effect on the ground and foliage. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

Back *to* the Land

Fred Rozumalski
mows paths so he
can walk through
the woods on his
16-acre property.

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Views from the front porch encompass newly planted garden beds and a new oval prairie planting by the barn. Photo by Fred Rozumalski

A landscape architect gives his historic 16-acre farmstead near Marine on St. Croix a sustainability makeover.

STORY AND PHOTOS GAIL HUDSON

TANGLEWOOD FARM SITS JUST UP THE HILL from the quaint town of Marine on St. Croix in Minnesota's wine country. A couple years ago, highly respected Twin Cities landscape architect, ecologist and horticulturist Fred Rozumalski and his husband, Lakmal, bought the historic 16-acre site. As he does with all public and private landscape projects, Fred plans to work with nature to create a low-maintenance landscape that is functional, beautiful and supports both plant and animal diversity.

Though it dates back to the 1880s, the farmstead is in prime shape, ready to be reimagined with a sustainability focus. A renovated, four-bedroom farmhouse rests on top of glacial moraine, a rolling landscape that features nature at every angle. The property boasts a good-sized orchard, a rebuilt historic barn with solar panels, space for an ample vegetable garden and a deer fence surrounding the entire

property, which butts up against a nature reserve. And, to top it off, invasive buckthorn has been largely eradicated.

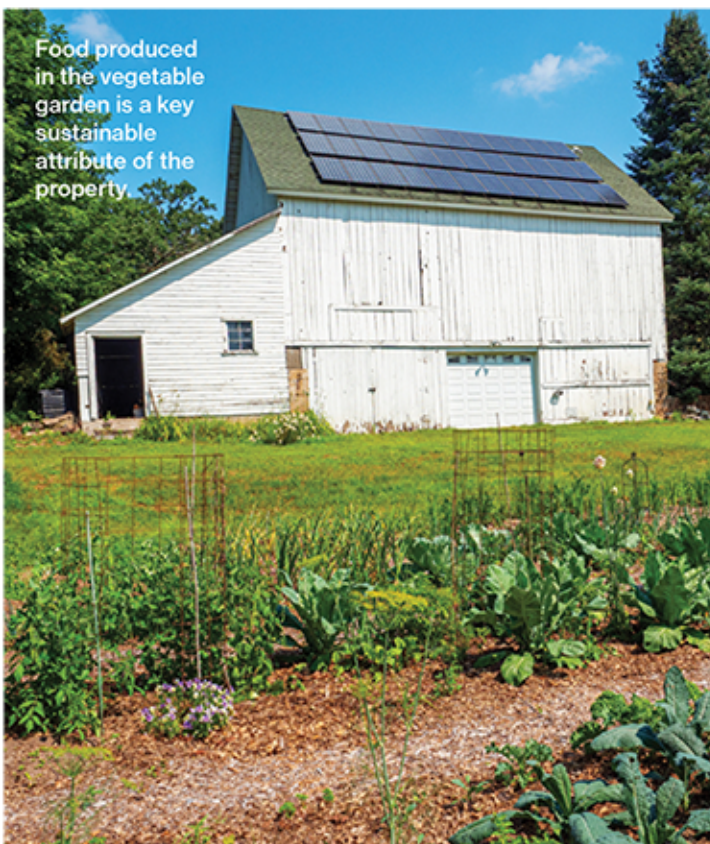
"I'm just frosting this amazing cake, and only parts of it," Fred says. "I mean it was spectacular when we got here, and now I'm just creating the gardens and taking care of everything," he says.

Fred says he's a believer in the power of every landowner's potential to help regenerate ecological balance. He's designed practical, sustainable landscapes for Macalester College and Carleton College's Arboretum and helped cities like Bloomington, Minnetonka and Woodbury manage native plant community restoration areas in their parks and natural spaces. He also designed a wetland restoration of the Spring Peeper Meadow at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum.

With his steady, practiced hand, Fred hopes to set an example for other homeowners' landscapes, big and small.



A big patch of
bee balm dazzles
in the woods.



Food produced
in the vegetable
garden is a key
sustainable
attribute of the
property.

One of the first steps toward creating a more sustainable yard, Fred says, is to shrink the lawn. Traditional turf grass soaks up lots of resources (water, fertilizer, pesticides). Dwindling supplies of groundwater, even in Minnesota, need to be conserved. Typically, he says, we grow way more lawn than we need. Instead, he says the goal is to make it an “intentional” lawn—think of it more like a rug than a blanket.

Here’s how he’s doing it. Between the barn and the house, Fred pulled up a large oval of lawn and installed drought-resistant prairie plants. “It’s really coming in great,” he says. “You get black-eyed Susans coming right away, hoary vervain (*Verbena stricta*, USDA Hardiness Zone 4) is really going gangbusters the first year, Mexican hats (*Ratibida columnifera*, zone 4), of course, the bee balm and fragrant hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*, zone 3).” The perennials are doing so well that he’s actually weeding out some of them, along with an overzealous planting of stiff goldenrod (*Solidago rigida*, zone 3).

Fred collected seeds from those plants and other nearby places for another, much larger prairie planting on the rise directly in front of the house. “You get a lot of seed in a little while,” he says, “by pulling your hand up the plant once.” To prepare for dormant seeding of the prairie in October 2024, the area was mowed, then sprayed with the herbicide Roundup in two applications two weeks apart to eliminate aggressive non-natives such as smooth brome, spotted knapweed, leafy spurge and bird’s foot trefoil. “My goal is biodiversity,” Fred says. “My approach to herbicides is to use them sparingly, targeted and at the time of most effectiveness.”

Using several techniques, Fred gave the new prairie plants the upper hand for survival. The area wasn’t tilled beforehand, so the seed bank (viable weed seeds in the soil) wouldn’t be disturbed. It means a lot less competition. Instead, a slit seeder was used to slice the ground and drop seeds of herbaceous plants into the cracks for better soil contact. A drill was used to plant grasses.

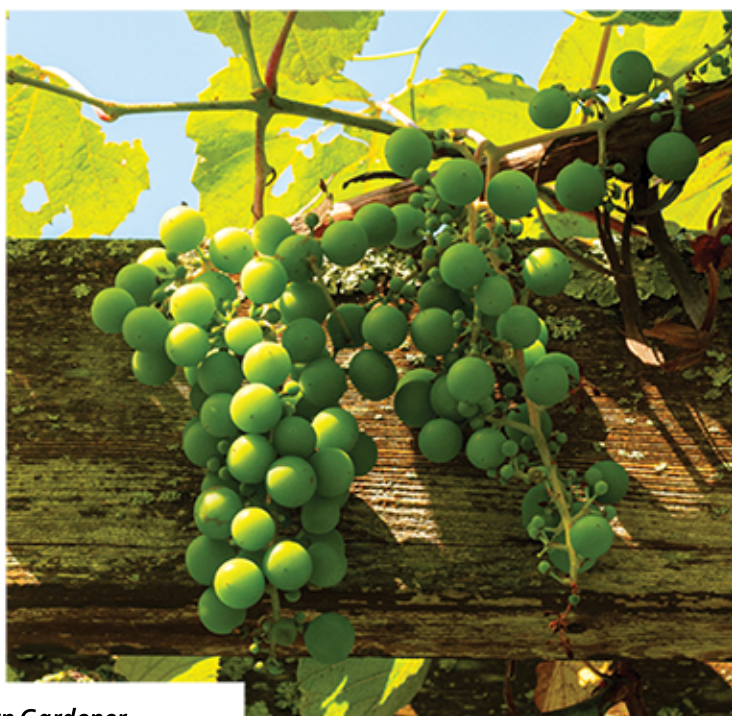
By the time he’s finished, 3 to 4 acres or a quarter of the property will be dedicated to prairie-savanna habitat to bring more diversity for the butterflies and birds. “We really consider this a refuge,” he says. “I do see unusual insects here and it’s nice that there’s so much other habitat around here [like the St. Croix river].”

Grassy areas in front of the house were uprooted for rectangular garden beds filled with low-maintenance perennials and annuals. He included many pollinator-friendly varieties such as a pale pink and lavender Oriental lettuce-leaved poppy called ‘Imperial Pink’ (*Papaver somniferum*, annual), red and salmon-colored yarrow (*Achillea paprika*, zone 3), tall alliums, catmint (*Nepeta*, zone 3), as well as Asiatic lilies, Turk’s Cap lilies (*Lilium martagon*, zone 3), Lamb’s ear (*Stachys byzantina*, zone 4a), ferns and a variety of grasses.

As for the rest of the lawn? Fred stopped mowing it, only shearing the edges and making paths. This allows the couple to walk through the property, access the barns, gardens and orchard and more practically, drive an ATV-load of wood to restock wood stoves in the house.



Blueberries ripen in the orchard, which also includes some very new varieties of apples, plus three varieties of pears that ripen in sequence. Fred says the table grapes on the pergola are "delicious."



"If you don't have the plants, then you don't have the insects and you don't have the birds, the whole food web. We just have to start."

Allium begins blooming in July.

Views that bring the outside in are an important sustainable attribute to Fred.

Lorem Ipsum

"A lot of what we're looking for in the landscape is neatness," Fred says. "The edge of it is very carefully articulated ... for the beauty of it to guide the eye and the person to where I want them to go."

As a landscape architect at Barr Engineering in Minneapolis, Fred works to connect the indoors to the outdoor environment in his many projects. He applied the same principles at home by lowering and widening the windows. "In the winter, I want to be able to sit there, have my coffee and look outside and really be a part of it," he says. "I'm going to have the view ... and have more light in the house."

Fred also ripped out foundational plantings of hydrangeas and red-twig dogwoods, which can't be readily seen from inside. Gone, too, are a "wall" of lilac shrubs and the lower branches of a Norway spruce that hid the view. "I've been carefully pruning for these distant views and mowing the trail and creating this intrigue and interest to draw you in and draw the eye back," he explains. He turned one bed close to the house into a white garden with birch trees, "so we have a foreground and a background."

The orchard can't be seen from the house, but it's one of the property's most beautiful and sustainable features. Homegrown produce minimizes the need for pesticides and herbicides, and the extensive transportation of food.

A wire enclosure surrounds several apple trees such as Zestar!®, 'Honeygold' and 'Haralson', three varieties of pears, several apricot trees and rows of berry shrubs, from blueberries to honeyberries.

Bunches of table grape vines decorate a wood pergola. "It's really nice to be down here," Fred says. "It's very quiet and the birds are amazing." He recalls meeting a pair of scarlet tanagers the first time they visited the property, which the couple saw as an omen to buy it.

A large vegetable garden sits in a sunny plot next to the barn. Fred grows a wide range of cool and warm season vegetables such as kale, onions, chard and tomatoes.

A final key piece for achieving sustainability in this landscape is controlling the overpopulation of deer. "What [the deer] are doing is extirpating species—so, local extinction," Fred says. He'll be bringing back natives such as wild ginger, trillium and bloodroot. "Great Merrybells (*Uvularia grandiflora*, zone 3) should be all over here," he says, "but there's not one." Mining bees, sweat bees and ants feed on the nectar of this plant's drooping yellow flowers.

"If you don't have the plants, then you don't have the insects and you don't have the birds, the whole food web," he says. Fred says it takes one plant a time. "We just have to start."

DIY AT HOME

How to Plant a Prairie

If you have space, scratch the itch to be more sustainable by adding a mini prairie to your landscape. Even if you only have a sunny boulevard, you can grow your own prairie slowly with seeds or quickly with plants. Each of these plants will bloom in a prairie the first year, and pollinators love them all.

WHAT TO GROW



Black-eyed Susan
Rudbeckia hirta

Butterfly weed
Asclepias tuberosa

Hoary vervain
Verbena stricta

Queen Anne's lace
Daucus carota

Large coneflower
Rudbeckia maxima

Yarrow
Achillea millefolium



STEPS TO GARDEN MORE SUSTAINABLY

- 1 Stop using lawn chemicals.** Use organic fertilizers just once a year (after Labor Day) if you must fertilize the lawn. Learn to love or at least accept dandelions and other lawn weeds—some attract pollinators and are drought resistant.
- 2 Reduce or eliminate watering.** See what survives and replace plants that don't make the cut with drought-tolerant species.
- 3 Watch for birds, insects and other pollinators.** Be curious about the wildlife in your garden.
- 4 Think about places in your lawn where you only go to mow.** Eliminate those patches over time. Mass shrub plantings of low bush honeysuckle, Gro-low sumac or junipers are simple, low-maintenance lawn substitutions that don't require watering once established.
- 5 Visit gardens and arboreetums** featuring sustainable, low-water input landscapes for inspiration.



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