



Landscape Ontario Podcast

Think globally, act locally:

You can make a difference against climate change

Host: Karina Sinclair

Guest: Bill Hardy, CLHM

Transcription

INTRO:

Karina: Hello and welcome! I'm Karina Sinclair and you're listening to the Landscape Ontario podcast.

Have you ever wondered if what you're doing as a landscaper to mitigate climate change is enough? The global situation feels so complex and monumental sometimes, and I think we all wonder at some point 'how can I, just one individual, make a difference?'

Bill Hardy is our guest on the podcast today and he says the trick is to think globally, but act locally. I'd say he knows a thing or two about that. Bill is a certified landscape horticulturalist and owns Grow and Gather, an independent retail garden centre in British Columbia. He is currently the chair for the Canadian Nursery Landscape Association. He serves on the boards of the Green Cities Foundation and the International Association of Horticulture Producers (AIPH), as well as a number of other advisory committees. His participation in all of these organizations gives him a wide perspective of how climate change is being addressed by horticulture and landscaping innovators around the world, while also being tapped into what's happening right here in Canada.

In our conversation, we discuss which countries are leading the way by developing innovative green city solutions, and what an individual landscaper can do to contribute to the big picture (and you know what, it's actually a lot!). We also share some awesome websites you'll want to check out for inspiration, and even introduce you to a new tool you can use to measure the carbon impact of installing and maintaining a landscape.

There's so much to explore, so let's dive right in.

Music transition

INTERVIEW:

Karina: Thanks for joining us here on the Landscape Ontario podcast, Bill. I'm really excited to hear your global perspectives as somebody who's part of the CNLA, the Green Cities Foundation, AIPH and all these other big organizations that are having a global impact.

I'd love to hear more from your perspective about what it's like to be part of these organizations and part of this big global perspective of landscape and horticulture.

Bill: So I'm currently chair of the Canadian Nursery Landscape Association, the CNLA. I've been involved with them for many years in many roles over those years. The last number of years have been especially keen on environmental issues, climate change adaptation, et cetera. And that led me to a role with the International Association of Horticultural Producers, the AIPH, as their Green City chair, which I've had that position for about five years now. And that's really given me the opportunity to experience a lot of global issues and travel a bunch around the world to see how different cities, different regions, different climate zones are handling the current climate situation. So that's kind of my background.

Karina: It's really exciting that Canada gets to have a voice at the big stage. Recently you went to some major events this past year. Do you want to tell me a little bit about that?

Bill: Sure. So, the spring meeting this year was in Doha, Qatar, for the AIPH. We had a Green City Conference that was specifically around greening cities in arid zones, particularly deserts.

And I found it really fascinating because the technology that is being used in deserts to create green spaces can be adapted to many cities around the world, especially as we're finding that dry periods are drier and longer, and wet periods are wetter and longer, and more severe. So how people are using green solutions to improve their cities and tackle some of these issues is quite remarkable, and it's amazing to see some of the great work that's being done around the world.

Karina: And how about the COP Summit?

Bill: The COP Summit last fall was very good. CNLA has invested a fair chunk of time and effort into that. We started in 2022 in Glasgow. And the reason it caught our interest is it was the first time, really, that a COP Summit started talking about the other side of the climate cycle, so the capture side versus just the emissions side. Most COP climate summits have been around the emission side and reducing emissions. So that caught our interest.

We went strictly to the non-observer zone, what they call the green zone at that point. And then in Egypt, for COP27, I guess that would have been, we were able to send one delegate that had access to the blue zone, it gave us a little bit more insight. So we applied for the blue zone ourselves for COP28 in Dubai. And we were granted approval. So three of us from the CNLA attended that as well as one from the AIPH. And it was interesting to see the remarkable shift in just those three short years of how nature-based solutions seem to be front and centre of most of the conversations. Even though a lot of the policy and some of the larger frameworks were still set around the emission side, the conversation was really, really opening up around green solutions, especially on a broad scale.

Karina: Now, when you talk about these different zones that you had access to, does that mean whether you were able to listen in to discussions and then be able to participate in discussions?

Bill: Yeah. The way the COP is set up, there's a green zone, which is open to just about anybody. It's kind of like the trade show element where numerous companies and countries are showing off technology, a lot of finance, a lot of different strategies that would be, like I say, more like a trade show. The blue zone, which is restricted, and it's actually a UN, a United Nations zone. It's considered to be part of the United Nations versus the host country. And it's where all the high-level negotiating and presentations are done, which has a little bit more limited audience, but the rest of us that go as observers or media or whatever can basically pick and choose what you want to see.

And it's, it's quite amazing. With three of us there, we still covered, I'm going to say, two or three per cent of what was available. There's literally 1000 to 1200, panel sections a day. One hundred, eight-nine countries represented. There's different pavilions around themes like sustainability, et cetera, so it really is a lot of information being presented and a lot to absorb.

So the three of us that were there, we always split up and went our own separate ways to cover as much as possible. And we made some really good connections. Because of a panel discussion that the CNLA was on with Audrey from the AIPH, we were able to impact or make an impression on one of the Canadian senators.

And so as a follow up to that COP Conference, we did a presentation on soils in urban areas to the Canadian Senate. So, that's remarkable progress. And it's the connections there that you make. And then how you manage those connections between conferences that really makes an impact.

Karina: What were some of the things that you learned or took away from attending those sessions that would apply to people working in landscaping and horticulture in Canada?

Bill: There's growing awareness of the value of green spaces in cities. At the high level of COP, nature-based solutions, they kind of, it was kind of a very broad scale. So oceans, forests, mangroves, and it kind of stopped at the city border. However, a lot of the presentations focused on what was actually happening within the cities, especially around biodiversity and climate solutions.

One of the most valuable panels I attended had a couple of people from the UK, including a professor responsible for nature-based solutions at the University of Oxford. And we've been able to connect since with her. And the thing that I think both of us will get out of that relationship is, through the AIPH, we have many case studies revolving around green solutions for cities, and so did the University of Oxford. And what everybody seems to want nowadays is metrics, and particularly the case studies that she was mentioning had actual measurements and dollars of what green solutions can bring to a city.

So it's those kinds of connections, that kind of conversation and everything. I mean, ultimately our goal would be to move the needle with the Canadian government on solutions and actually incorporating green solutions as deeper part of regulation.

Karina: To bring Canada more in line with some of these progressive countries around the world. So who's doing it really well? What countries or regions are proving to be really innovative and progressive in this space?

Bill: I think in Europe, probably the Netherlands leads the way in a lot of respects, along with the UK, which I guess is not part of the EU anymore, but the EU seems to always be a few years, if not a decade, ahead of us on solutions. Some of the issues that we're experiencing now, they've already experienced with population growth and urbanization and labour issues and everything.

I'm also highly impressed with Australia and what Australia has been able to do, given that it's a country about the same size or population of Canada. The resources that they put into research and development and marketing of plants as a solution has been quite amazing over the years. They've won, actually in Australia, they've won many awards.

And I think I introduced you to that [Greener Spaces, Better Places](#) website, which is a really, really good resource.

Karina: That was an excellent website, and I'll be sure to include those in the show notes, because once I looked at that website, I wanted to share it with all sorts of other people because I thought it was so clever.

So the EU, the Netherlands, Australia, those are some great leading examples that Canada could follow. More specifically, what are they doing that's several years or ten years in advance? What's something that we should have been doing by now?

Bill: Well, specifically on the horticultural side, they have a lot of solutions around water management. Around different growing techniques that are more sustainable. We have the issue of plastics in our industry here in Canada that, you know, the government is looking at solutions for... the Netherlands has led pretty much the EU on plastic solutions with recycled content and with reusable versus, you know, trashable products.

The certificate scheme over there now has 100 per cent of the growers that sell through RoyalFlora Holland, which is the main Netherlands distributor of floral products, they now have 100 per cent of their growers in the certification program. So different things like that, that,

I think sometimes we can be guilty here of being a little bit reactive versus proactive. And I think some of that maybe has been driven by regulation over there that was coming down the pipe. But I think they've been a little bit more on the forefront of developing solutions before they've become a real issue.

Karina: Could that be because the infrastructure there is so much older than it might be in most of Canada and they're having to update things and come up with fresh ideas to just make their cities more livable, and as they're replacing outdated infrastructure, that's the time to do it?

Bill: That's part of it. As you allude to, a lot of the cities over there are very old with very old architecture. So, I always kind of find it a little bit funny that in Canada we say we can't do these things because we don't have the space or whatever, or it would cost too much money, but they're finding solutions over there. There's cities like Barcelona and Spain that have literally changed their city and the way that they live within their city by creating what they call super blocks and eliminating local traffic through the inner sides, insides of those super blocks, creating pedestrian, restaurant, you know, just very, very livable spaces.

Paris has made great strides in the last few years. It seems to always be about leadership. Who the, either the mayor or senior level of government, that has the wherewithal to understand the importance of green spaces in cities. I mean, let's face it, 83 per cent of Canadians live in cities, and that's where we can have the most impact on health.

And it's also an area that is important, even from a global scale, because 70 per cent of emissions come from cities and reducing emissions in cities is a goal of COP, but making them also more healthy and more livable while we're transitioning is critical.

Karina: You said that a lot of these decisions are driven by the leaders. What can an individual do to make a global difference? We have lots of really talented and progressive horticulturalists and landscapers and green stewards here in Canada. But as individuals, they might feel like they're just too small to be part of a big change. What do you say to that?

Bill: I think that's, that common philosophy is that there's really nothing I can do. I remember a research project that was actually working with focus groups to actually ask that question, and most people just thought it was out of their reach, that there was not much they could do. But if you look at a city, and you look at a satellite image, most of the space other than the public space that's taken up for roads and commercial buildings is residential. And for example, in Vancouver, we have a net loss of trees over the last few years. And all of that pretty much is on private land versus public land. The public is actually increasing plantings well, where private spaces are growing and bigger houses are being put on or whatever, and trees are being removed. So looking at the impact everybody can have in their own individual yards and spaces does impact the larger, the larger society.

But maybe even more importantly, it improves their own health and well-being. I mean, there are so many research studies out there right now that show that if you're in a hospital room and you can see trees, you get better faster, and the same thing happens with us at home.

There's research being done in the other in the EU right now that I find fascinating around just re-greening schoolyards and the difference it makes for kids in school to have green spaces to go in and play in versus concrete playgrounds and concrete jungles.

Not to mention the benefits around air quality alone. I think when I first started talking about the subject a few years ago, the very beginning of the conversation was, is the climate, the way it's adapting and our air quality and everything, is it even real? There's no question about that now. The research is there. It's verifiable. It's quantifiable. Seven million people die around the world every year just because of poor air quality. And it's considered one of the leading causes of preventable death. And I can't think of anything else that produces air other than plants. Never mind the role that they play in cooling in our cities and cleaning our air.

You know, PM 2.5 or that small particulate matter is the leading cause of so many issues around health, including asthma amongst kids. Like I say, it causes a lot of premature death, and that affects every city in the world, not just the poor countries or the developing countries. It's, you know, Vancouver last year, for a period of three weeks had some of the worst air quality in the world because of the forest fires and that poor air quality, that primary contributor to that air

quality is PM 2.5 or that particulate matter, not just the fact that it's a little bit smoky and smelly. So, yeah, it does make a difference, for sure.

Karina: That's really interesting that there are more trees and greenery being installed and maintained in public spaces. But the private sector is removing it in favor of bigger houses. So when landscapers are working with their clients, this is a great opportunity for them to reimagine that space and to encourage them to put something back in that's going to benefit sustainability, biodiversity. Is there a tool that could help them measure and observe the difference of adding all this greenery?

Bill: Yeah. There is. And we'll be doing a kind of a beta launch or a soft launch for Earth Day this coming week of what we have branded it as the Clean Air calculator tool developed by the CNLA in partnership with University of Guelph, and a lot of research. There's actually a research paper that's been peer reviewed and accepted that is the basis for the Clean Air calculator. And that will give every homeowner the opportunity to not only measure their impact of their current space, but also see the impact of adding something like more shrubs or more trees or, you know, turf sometimes gets a bad reputation, but turf is a thousand times better than pavement, especially as permeability and everything becomes an issue with our heavy rainfall and everything. So that tool called the Clean Air Calculator will be available through the Green Cities Foundation website. And yeah, we're launching very soon and hoping to actually get some feedback early in the process of how it's working. It measures four metrics: the amount of clean air produced, the amount of people impacted by that air, kilometres offset and carbon sequestered.

Carbon sequestration, of course, is a big thing globally. Kind of a little bit less important sometimes in cities, although still really important. I mean, in cities, we're after the clean air and cooling and all the other benefits that plants bring around health and well-being is probably more critical than carbon sequestration. But, yeah, that tool is launching very soon.

Karina: That's great news. I'll include a link to that as well in the show notes. And it does sound like it'd be pretty empowering to be able to see if I add to the greenery on my property instead of in favour of, you know, putting down just landscaping rocks or paving it or something like that, then to see 'oh, this does make a difference.' And as one person, collectively, if my neighbour does this, too, and across the street, they do this too. And then growing that network

of feeling good about the contribution you make, not just to your local environment, but to the global environment as well.

Bill: Yes, absolutely. Every little bit helps. I can't emphasize that enough.

Karina: So then let's talk about some of the progress we've made. Are there any good news stories or wins happening in sustainable efforts? Like what can we talk about that inspires people to keep going, even though this feels like it's really hard?

Bill: It's not really hard, it's actually something that's very pleasurable. You just have to make the decision that it's good for you and good for society and where you live. You know, getting out into green space and getting your hands dirty and planting things is considered one of the best hobbies in the world.

So it's not like it's difficult. Sometimes in our busy lives, it would seem that way, but I really think we're making progress. We have some cities in Canada that are, you know, global leaders in, making remarkable transitions in their cities. And more and more often, we're seeing green solutions as a solution to a very large problem. Things like, flooding and everything that's happened in Toronto and happened in Calgary a few years ago. It was openly acknowledged that better use of their green spaces and more green infrastructure would have really, really helped mitigate those disasters.

So, Montreal, I think is a leading city in Canada right now with, again, good leadership. Edmonton's up there. Toronto's up there. Vancouver has been there for many years and doing a very good job. so we are doing things. Whether we're doing it fast enough on the scale we want is a question mark. But I think we are being effective, and I think it's very easy. It's a very easy sell, especially with homeowners, when you're suggesting the value of plants and using them instead of non-permeable surfaces to add to your living space.

Karina: A minute ago, you mentioned Montreal being very progressive in this space. And, it makes me recall that, I think it was just last year that [they won an award](#), a [Green Cities award](#) from the AIPH, about their use of phytotechnology.

Bill: Yeah!

Karina: That was very exciting how they're remediating ponds and shorelines by clever use of plants.

Bill: Yeah. They were actually in a couple categories two years ago at the last Green City Awards. And, they did win for the "Living Green for Water" for that use of the phytotechnology in cleansing water. and it's something I think that one of the reasons why it was selected as a winner is it's something that's transferable to any cities.

As we're entering another summer where drought is going to be a problem, solutions for using greywater or being able to clean water and aid in climate mitigation around severe rainfall events and everything is going to become more and more valuable.

One of the things at COP that we learned is the insurance industry is one of the one of the industries that is most worried about how things are developing because, as we know, it's cost a lot more lately for insurance, although since things seem to be evening out a little bit. But the insurance industry is really worried about wildfire fires that are affecting cities, floods that are affecting cities, never mind the health consequences that both those things bring.

Karina: Yeah. That's, I mean, again, those feel like such big, powerful and uncontrollable weather events and climate events that it may be tempting just to throw your hands up and say that I can't do anything about it! But from everything you're saying, it sounds like from the municipal level. The national level, right down to the backyard level, all these things are able to contribute to a positive solution.

Which leads me to want to ask you about [Plants Love You](#). Now, this is a new campaign by the CNLA. Tell me a little bit more about that and how that can help Canadian landscapers.

Bill: Well, a number of years ago, through the Canadian Ornamental Horticultural Association, they funded a focus group and some research around the value of plants, particularly in cities. And one of the things that they came up with was the fact that they kind of turn things around from 'we love plants' to 'plants love you.' And I just recently posted something in LinkedIn that got some pretty good traction where it basically said, if you had someone that loved you so much that they provided all the air you breathe, all the food you eat and cleaned all the water

you drink, you would really say that that someone loved you and plants do all of that, and they do all of it in spades.

So the Plants Love You campaign kind of turns it around a little bit to show the benefit we get from plants shows that, you know, that we should love them and they love us. It seems pretty simple to me, but it is a little bit of a complex idea. Hard to get your head around at first.

Karina: Well, especially as we think of ourselves as green stewards and WE are the ones that put, you know, the you know, maybe fertilizer gardens and water our gardens and prune them back. And you know, it feels like we're doing the heavy lifting, but that's not really the truth. It's the plants that are doing the heavy lifting in this whole relationship.

Bill: Correct. We often talk a lot about saving the pollinators and stuff. Well, we save the pollinators because pollinators actually give us the food that we eat and everything. But it all starts with the plants. If there's no plants, there's no need for pollinators.

So increasing the space that we have for plants within our cities, increasing the biodiversity, is all, I think, very important and can't be stated enough the value of it to cities even just for health and well-being.

Karina: Now the Plants Love You campaign is a marketing effort, and anyone who's a member of their provincial association like Landscape Ontario Landscape Alberta, the BCNLA. They're all members of the CLA as a whole. So what benefits do they get from this Plants Love You marketing campaign. What can they do with it?

Bill: Depends on the level that they come in at and who they are. So, for example, for the growers we can fund trade missions, both incoming and for going out to different trade shows in the markets that are identified through the agro-marketing program. So, for example, a grower attending a US trade show can get partial funding back.

For the retail, what we started doing with the last campaign, which was a Year of the Garden, we introduced a concept where a garden centre could centre all of their marketing around formerly the Year of the Garden — now Plants Love You. And as long as they're able to measure their impressions through the store signage, uniforms, social media posts, etc., then they can

participate in the agro-marketing program and basically get a 50 per cent refund on money that they spend in the program.

So it's really good. It's worked really well for us. I can't remember the exact amounts that we have available, but it's in the tune of greater than \$100,000 that's shared with members for promoting the Plants Love You program. And we share that equally amongst the Green Cities Foundation, Communities in Bloom, as well as our CNLA members directly.

Karina: That's really a fantastic way to help those businesses stretch their marketing dollars and continue to connect with property owners. So thank you for diving into that, because that's, I think, going to be a really great benefit.

Bill: Yes.

Karina: So, in all of our discussion today, we've talked about the global stage, all the big things that are happening, what countries and regions that are being really progressive and that we should keep an eye on for inspiration and that to not give up because even our individual efforts can make a difference.

So, Bill, thank you so much for coming on the podcast today to walk me through all of this. It was really, really interesting and I hope people find it inspiring.

Bill: It was my pleasure. And thanks very much for the invitation. I really do appreciate it.

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EXTRO:

Karina: I hope by now you know that 'you *can* make a difference' by continuing to nurture a cleaner and greener planet. You, the landscaper, the horticulturalist, the researcher, the grower, the shoveller, the irrigation pro, the turf manager, the builder, the architect, the designer. All of you, individually and collectively, are driving the green revolution. So go check out the resources listed in the show notes. Try the Clean Air Calculator to see some actual numbers that prove your efforts are worth it. Promote your services with the Plants Love You marketing funds program from the CNLA and remember: Think globally. Act locally. And don't give up.



I have provided links to the resources we talked about today, including the Clean Air Calculator and the Plants Love You campaign. Just check out the show notes for this episode at landscapeontario.com/podcast.

Thanks again for listening to the Landscape Ontario podcast, where I talk to all kinds of innovative and knowledgeable landscape professionals just like you. So if you have a story idea or want to recommend a guest or topic, let me know. And don't forget to subscribe to catch new episodes for inspiration every month.

Resources relevant to this episode

[Grow and Gather](#)

[AIPH.org](#)

[Montreal Botanical Garden Phytotechnology Stations](#)

[CNLA](#)

[Green Cities Foundation](#)

[Clean Air Calculator](#)

[Plants Love You Marketing Campaign](#)

[COP28 Climate Change Conference](#)

[Greener Spaces, Better Places](#)