

new supermaxes will be kept as museums of man's inhumanity to man. Until then, the unfortunate souls who remain imprisoned inside these sterile tombs will continue to howl as they descend into their madness, void of witnesses, void of human contact.

LORRAINE JOHNSON'S 7 GARDENS BROUGHT BEFORE THE LAW

Front lawns are contested zones. Neighbours and city inspectors have a long tradition of squabbling over a manicured versus a natural look. To the dismay of the fertilizer industry and neat freaks everywhere, there seems to be a growing realization that the function and form of a front yard needn't be at odds. Who knew—the birds, shrubs, pollinators, herbs and grasses can actually coexist without the sky falling. Here are some of the rebel plants and gardeners that have blazed the trail for front yard freedom in Canada.

Lorraine Johnson is the author of numerous books on gardening and environmental issues, including The New Ontario Naturalized Garden, The Gardener's Manifesto, and City Farmer: Adventures in Urban Food Growing. A perennial favourite with north-of-the-49th gardeners, 100 Easy-to-Grow Native Plants for Canadian Gardens was reissued by Douglas & McIntyre in 2017.

1. Grow It, Don't Mow It

When Cathy Smallwood and her husband were looking to buy a house in St. John's, Newfoundland, in 1985, they were particularly drawn to a subdivision called Woodlands. "The building lot was set in a forest," she explains. By the time construction was complete, though, the trees had been clear-cut, so Smallwood set about to "bring the landscape back," planting spruce and fir trees and blueberry bushes for a naturalized garden. In 1992, a neighbour complained, and Smallwood received a notice ordering her to conform to neighbourhood standards within three days. Smallwood turned the complaint on its head, arguing in a presentation to the city's Planning Committee that the neighbourhood standard was in fact a forest, since that was the original landscape. The battle to defend her garden lasted for three months, with a close council vote on the matter. The deputy mayor, a gardener, cast the deciding vote in favour of Smallwood's woodland. "A lot of people felt I was challenging authority," Smallwood says now, "but I wasn't doing it for that reason. I

did it to encourage biodiversity, to have a naturalized garden that attracted bees and butterflies." Or, as the sign she put on her front yard said: "Grow it, don't mow it."

2. Freedom of Plant Expression

It began with a celebration of her environmental beliefs and a desire to landscape *with* nature instead of maintaining a lawn, with its endless regimen of watering, weeding and mowing. But celebration turned to outrage when, in 1993, Sandy Bell was slapped with a \$50 fine for "excessive growth of grass and weeds" in her front-yard Toronto garden. Bell decided to fight the ticket, lost and then appealed the conviction to the Ontario Court of Justice, arguing that, under the Charter, she had a protected right to express her environmental values in her garden. The judge ruled in her favour, writing in his 1996 decision that "There are now thousands of private naturalized gardens in Toronto, and I think that the inevitable consequence of routine exposure to them is that they no longer shock one's sensibilities." As a result of Bell's battle, the city was forced to include a "natural garden" exemption in its tall grass and weeds bylaw. And Bell got her \$50 back.

3. Suburban Prairie Showdown

In the early 2000s, all of the drainage ditches in front of the houses on Doug Counter's quiet residential street in Etobicoke were uniformly maintained with closely clipped turf grass. But Counter decided to do something different on his little bit of city-owned boulevard: he planted a stormwater infiltration garden using native meadow species, mimicking what grows naturally in low, wet places to encourage water to seep into the ground rather than overburdening the storm sewers. The city declared his garden an illegal encroachment on the boulevard. Counter, a graphic designer by profession, found this ironic because he had designed a brochure for the city called "55 Ways to Green Etobicoke Naturally," in which homeowners were encouraged to plant wildflowers on city road allowances. But Counter's boulevard wasn't the only target of the city's ire. A continuing dispute with a neighbour, over a fence, led to complaints about Counter's front garden, too—a tallgrass prairie. When officials arrived in September 2000 to cut down his garden, a 45-minute standoff ensued: four city trucks, six city employees, two police cruisers, two policemen, and Counter's elderly father, Victor, in his socks, demanding to see a copy of the bylaw the garden contravened. Nobody could produce such a document, so the officials left. Counter

took the city to court and, in 2003, the Ontario Court of Appeal ruled that Counter had the protected right to express his environmental beliefs on the public land of the boulevard, subject only to safety considerations. Counter's ditch garden and tallgrass prairie could stay. Further, the judge had a directive: "The City can and ought to avoid problems of this sort by developing and implementing specific guidelines to deal with the critical issue of natural gardens and their enormous environmental significance."

4. 20 Centimetres or Else

When landscape architect and certified arborist Marc Willoughby moved into his North Toronto home in 1996, one of his first acts of property maintenance was to rip out the front lawn. He planned a biodiverse garden of native species, but the sandy soil required improvement, so Marc imported topsoil and planted alfalfa—a cover crop used by gardeners and farmers to enrich the soil—along with some native trees, shrubs and perennials. Someone complained, and in 2003 Willoughby received a notice of violation from the city, ordering him to cut the garden down to 20 centimetres within 72 hours or the city would do it for him and add the cost to his tax bill. As an environmentalist lacking a lawn mower, Willoughby got down on all fours and cut the plants by hand to the requisite height in time for the inspection. Twenty years later, his yard is flourishing with many trees, tall eastern white cedars near the house, and dozens of native wildflower species. "Some people still like a manicured front yard," he acknowledged a decade after his brush with the garden police. "Mine is being maintained . . . it's just being maintained differently."

5. Criminally Tall Grasses

Deborah Dale arrived home on a summer day in 2007 and discovered that her Scarborough garden had been razed to the ground, 10 years of work and growth in her front yard and boulevard reduced to stubble. Distraught, she phoned the police, only to discover that *she* was the one considered a criminal—it was city workers who had cut down her trees, shrubs and native plants due to a neighbour's complaint about "weeds" and tall grass. Dale, a past president and long-time board member of the North American Native Plant Society, had planted her garden with more than 200 native plant species, such as culver's root and vervain, and the week before the destruction she had taught a city-funded seminar on gardening with wildflowers. Incensed, she sued the city for damages. The case was settled out of court in 2014—seven years after the precipitating

cut—and the city gave Dale a written apology and rescinded the bill for cutting her garden.

6. Flower Power Fail in Cobourg

Miriam Mutton, a landscape architect who designs gardens for a living, was an elected town councillor in Cobourg, Ontario, when the municipality cut down her boulevard garden—three times in 2013—because her meadow plants were taller than 20 centimetres. Even after the boulevard rules changed to allow plants 76 centimetres tall, Mutton continued to have visits from bylaw officers. Two showed up in 2014 to order her to cut down a few tall milkweed plants, the only rogues over the height limit. "It felt like a personal and political issue," says Mutton, who is philosophical about the many ironies of her saga. She is no longer a councillor, and things seem to have turned around in her garden battle: in 2016, the town requested photographs of her boulevard garden so they could include them in their submission for a Communities in Bloom award.

7. To the Boulevards!

They live on a Mississauga street called Mineola Gardens, and they call themselves "a proud team of Mineola Gardeners." Strangers leave notes in their mailboxes thanking them for the beauty they've added to the streetscape with their boulevard gardens. But in the summer of 2015, three couples of the street received notices from the city, ordering them to cut down their "illegal encroachments" on city property and either return the boulevard to turf grass or apply for a permit to garden—at a cost of roughly \$2,000. They rallied a defence team, including Liz Primeau, founding editor of *Canadian Gardening* magazine and author of the book *Front Yard Gardens*, and a number of local horticultural societies, and made deputations to council to allow for boulevard gardens. Says Primeau, "These gardeners were bold and brave, and they persevered." And they were successful, but with a catch: boulevard gardeners in Mississauga still need to apply for a \$50 permit and they aren't allowed to plant vegetables.

12 UNUSUAL STOLEN OBJECTS

1. Gene Kelly's Lamppost

Bryan Goetzinger was part of the labour crew that cleared out the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer film company vaults when MGM ceded its Culver City, California, lot to Lorimar-Telepictures, in 1986. Among the items scheduled