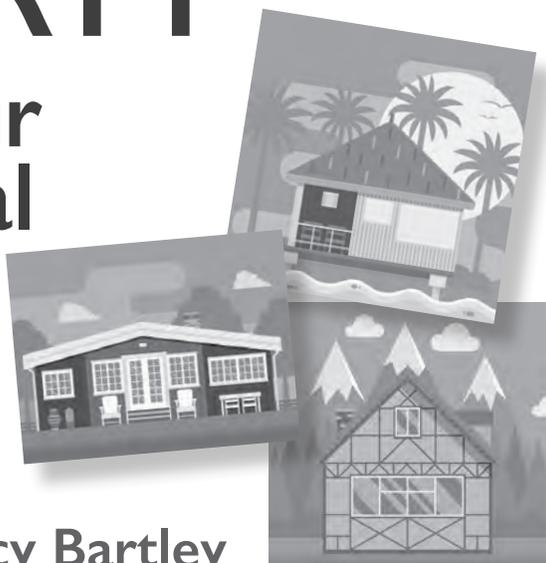


GREENING YOUR COTTAGE OR VACATION PROPERTY

Reduce Your
Recreational
Footprint



Joan Bartley & Tracy Bartley

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Self-Counsel Press acknowledges the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund (CBF) for our publishing activities.

Printed in Canada.

First edition: 2017

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Bartley, Joan, author

Greening your cottage or vacation property : reduce your recreational footprint / Joan Bartley & Tracy Bartley.

(Green series)

(Self-counsel reference)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Issued in print and electronic formats.

ISBN 978-1-77040-290-4 (softcover).—ISBN 978-1-77040-482-3 (EPUB).—

ISBN 978-1-77040-483-0 (Kindle)

1. Sustainable living. 2. Vacation homes. I. Bartley, Tracy, author II. Title. III. Series: Self-counsel reference series IV. Series: Self-Counsel green series

GE196.B37 2017

640.28'6

C2017-902366-7

C2017-902367-5

Self-Counsel Press

(a division of)

International Self-Counsel Press Ltd.

Bellingham, WA
USA

North Vancouver, BC
Canada



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Dedication

We dedicate this book to Ken Bartley — husband, dad, grandpa — whose building and construction knowledge and love of the land is forever with us at our island cottage.



Introduction

*You said you need the tree for its pulp,
You'd take but a few, you're aware
Of the home of the deer, the wolf, the fox,
Yet so much of their land now stands bare ...
If the beauty around us is to live through this day
We'd better start watching — and care.*

— David Bouchard, Roy Henry Vickers

A cottage, or vacation property, has as many reasons for being as there are properties and cottagers. However, one thing we can all relate to is the relationship between lifestyle choices at the cottage, and our shared environment. Greening one's cottage, inside and out, is an opportunity to make an environmentally conscious commitment to learn about and work towards a sustainable environment for our children, grandchildren, and beyond.

Our cottage vision, (yes, we created a vision statement for our cottage and we'll cover how you can too, in Chapter 1), expresses our

greening journey towards an environmentally sustainable lifestyle. Yours can be tailored to your cottage, property, and personality.

Our cottage vacation property is on land belonging to the Coast Salish people. Today, constant reminders of that past come to mind as we cohabitate with the fauna and flora of this Canadian, west coast vacation property. The setting is quiet. Our little cottage and vacation property is on an island, hidden within a new-growth forest of giant Douglas Fir, cedar, and grand fir. (This land has been victimized by clear cutting.) The relentless crashing of the ocean's waves against the sandstone beaches contributes to the naturally peaceful setting.

Grandchildren explore the forest, draw and paint their curiosities, organize the recycling, and plan for their tomorrows. This is nature's classroom where three generations of family members learn, work, and play.

At our family cottage, living in harmony with nature is the very essence of our lifestyle choice. It was clear right from the outset that this rural property was begging for an eco-conscious stewardship, and that's what we aim to give it.

The cottage was already 15 years old when we made our decision to purchase. It had been mindfully built and was of sound construction. Many salvaged materials and fixtures such as energy-efficient double-glazed windows, doors, and kitchen cabinetry were sourced from previous dwellings. The appliances were all as old as the cottage, yet in good working order. Outbuildings, such as a woodshed, garden/storage shed, and water system shed were in an unfinished state. Over the years the grounds had acquired quite a bit of Scotch broom (a noxious weed), and fallen branches and trees, creating a fire hazard. The potential to restore this property was obvious, yet there was work to be done.

Immediately we began recycling, repurposing, and reusing; we had begun our greening process. However, there was much to learn about greening, and a need to prioritize in order to determine a plan of action: a greening action plan. Our goal was to reduce our environmental footprint and attain a sustainable lifestyle; that is, we wanted to restore and conserve our natural resources, to invest in eco-friendly upgrades, and ultimately to attain a long-term environmental balance inside and outside our cottage.

I. Purpose of This Book

The purpose of this book is to show cottagers, across the generations and a wide variety of locations and builds, that they can make a difference to the wellness of the environment. Based on one family's journey at one cottage, this book illustrates a greening process which is planned, practical, flexible, and adaptable.

The chapters take you through a vision-constructing process, setting out with the end in mind, and closing with substantive greening actions and reflections.

Throughout the book, environmentally conscious projects and actions are described in everyday terms complemented with personal stories and experiences. In some instances, environmental concerns, particularly those resulting from years of consumerism and perceived convenience, are discussed as they pertain to various aspects of greening at the cottage, and as a reminder that human actions have caused great havoc to the environment. Yet we wish to bring a message of hope; that greening your cottage, inside and out, can make a positive difference towards environmental sustainability.

Greening strategies, eco-friendly tips, and reflective practices are provided, and readers are given the challenge to create a Cottage Greening Action Plan to put into place at their own cottages or vacation properties.

A list of websites and books for further reading, including children's literature, is shared on the download kit included with this book.



Getting Started: Crafting Your Vision Statement

... cleaner energy and a healthier Earth are within our reach as long as we remain attentive and committed to a vision of a world in which our perceived needs are not always placed first.

— Lori Ryker

Getting started at greening your cottage is a vision-constructing process, setting out with an end in mind: a greening goal. Thus, the process starts with goal-setting: What do you expect to accomplish as a result of your greening commitment?

Your goal is the foundation upon which your vision will be crafted, and, your vision (put into a statement) puts into context your goal. A vision describes a broader picture of values, aspirations, and greening actions. Your cottage greening vision statement will express how your greening goal will ultimately look, sound, and feel.

1. Defining Greening and Sustainability

It is important to define “greening” and “sustainability” before we move on. Greening encompasses the conscious practices taken to attain an environmentally sustainable lifestyle. Greening your cottage will become influential to your transitioning lifestyle. You will notice that your greening practices or habits will evolve and grow, becoming a natural way of living. Over time, your lifestyle will become one which nurtures sustainability.

Sustainability is the ultimate goal of greening where everyone at the cottage, or associated with the cottage, works toward a sustainable lifestyle. A sustainable lifestyle will enable nature to re-establish her original role of checks and balances to restore and conserve a healthy self-sustaining environment.

Greening and sustainability, two interrelated concepts, are integral to what we are discussing in this book and what you are attempting to do. These two concepts will take on a deeper meaning as you work through your vision-constructing process. With conscious and persistent greening, sustainability can become a reality.

2. Setting Your Greening Goal

Setting your greening goal needs to be a collaborative effort in order to engage all family members, partners, or co-owners: you and your fellow cottagers. What do you want your greening goal to be? Ask yourself and your fellow cottagers: What do we expect to accomplish as a result of our collective greening commitment?

As the title of this book suggests, a sustainable lifestyle is the ultimate greening goal. This is lofty; indeed, it is within reach. Your goal may seem far off, or even unattainable at first. Greening goals are based upon individuals’ knowledge and understanding of a variety of environmental concepts, issues, strategies, actions, and practices. Think about all of these when considering your possible cottage lifestyle goal. Your goal may be focused on: energy efficiency, renewable resources, greenhouse gases (GHGs), zero waste, nurturing nature, or, whatever you and your fellow cottagers feel will be fitting to your values and greening commitment.

Begin the conversation, with yourself if you’re a solo cottager, or with family members or partners, if you have co-owners or partners

in the property. What do you expect to accomplish as a result of our greening at the cottage, inside and out?

The following greening actions may be helpful conversation starters as you explore and consider a possible goal or goals for your cottage greening journey:

- Restoring and conserving nature.
- Conserving natural resources.
- Investing in eco-friendly upgrades.
- Minimizing stuff.
- Renovating, or building a cottage, with reclaimed and salvaged materials.
- Retrofitting with renewable materials and resources.
- Reducing the carbon footprint: greenhouse gases.
- Zero waste management.
- Becoming energy efficient.
- Building a sustainable cottage.

Rest assured, whatever your greening goal (and subsequent greening vision), environmental benefits will be realized at the cottage, and beyond. Getting started at greening your cottage has the potential for multiple positive effects upon your health; the health of your family; the health and well-being of your community; and in the long term, the health of the environment.

3. Exploring and Visioning: What Lifestyle and Environmental Values Define Your Ultimate Cottage Experience?

This is a question to reflect upon in order to set a context for one's greening goal: What is your ultimate greening vision? Explore your values and desired lifestyle aspirations, particularly in view of working towards an environmentally sustainable lifestyle. How will your vision describe how your greening goal at the cottage looks, sounds, and feels? It is important to understand that a vision-constructing process can be challenging, and messy!

Though sustainability is the ultimate result of greening, it may appear too idealistic a focus for your greening vision, at least for the time being. A greening vision will vary from cottager to cottager and locale to locale, and take on a very personal and introspective approach towards a desired cottage lifestyle, and beyond.

There are as many responses to this as there are cottages and cottagers. A few familiar replies are: “This is where I get away from it all to relax and to refresh.” “It is our haven away from the city.” “I yearn to get back to nature.” “This is our quality family time.”

It seemed that all of the above, and more, was important to our family’s cottaging ideals. Fortunately for our family, we rented several cottages within our island community before making the decision to become cottage owners. As renters, we found ourselves surrounded by the flora and fauna of the west coast rainforest; and we became armored with our closeness to nature. At the same time, we learned about and valued the environmentally conscious culture of the community.

Our first rental experience impacted our eventual greening plan immensely. The owner’s message to us read: “You are responsible for the removal of your garbage upon your departure.” With a baby in our family, there was definitely garbage. This meant learning about the community’s already progressive recycling program, composting our biodegradable waste, and/or packing up and removing our refuse upon our departure. We did all three; and we learned that most of our non-recyclable and non-compostable refuse was composed of packaging, and disposable baby diapers!

Immersed in nature, and joining a community where greening was more the norm than the exception, became an imminent calling to green our cottage inside and out. Our cottage already possessed integrity, sustainability wise. It was consciously constructed with locally sourced cedar products, salvaged and reclaimed cabinetry and doors, and energy-efficient, double glazed windows. Furthermore, it was situated on a beautiful, forested rural property! A cottage surrounded by nature, three generations of family members to share the responsibility, and a collective will and understanding that there would be a lot to learn and do: We were ready to green our cottage.

Because nature was so influential to the joy of our cottage life, greening the cottage extended beyond the walls of the cottage. There was a natural interconnectedness between the cottage and the property. And, based upon the desire to build upon what we already saw as valuable greening attributes at our cottage, we saw a sustainable environmental goal as being inherent. With reflection, excited anticipation, and exploration, a vision began to emerge into words.



Figure 1: A glimpse at our cottage life

Our vision involved:

- Escaping from the city.
- Relaxing and rejuvenating.
- Restoring and conserving nature.
- Spending quality time together.

- Quiet.
- Living in harmony with nature.
- Committing to a greening lifestyle.
- Embracing a minimalist lifestyle.
- Reflecting.
- Renovating with reclaimed and renewable resources and materials.
- Practicing zero waste.

Your greening vision may involve a single value, or several values encompassing the ideal cottage lifestyle for you.

If you are starting with a blank slate or are in the planning stages of building a new cottage, it makes sense that your vision includes sustainable building strategies. At the very least, consider reclaimed building materials and incorporate the infrastructure for renewable clean energy sources, such as geothermal heating and cooling, solar energy, or rain water catchment.

If you are starting with an established property, your vision can be based on the greening strategies and practices you already have in place, along with those you would like to see realized, as time and finances afford. Your Taking Stock checklist, (Checklist 1 discussed in Chapter 2), will help you determine a realistic starting point.

How do you want your cottage experience or lifestyle to look, sound, and feel? Explore this as you brainstorm several possible greening visions. Think big. A greening vision is about looking to the future.

It appears many cottagers, once exploring and engaging in a vision-constructing process, soon feel the urge to get to work. In fact, many see this as a prime time to explore a greening action which they have read or heard about. Exploration helps to form and inform your greening vision, and to build confidence: You can do this!

4. Get to Work Straightaway: What Can You Do Now?

The excitement, anticipation, and exploration is an opportunity to get to work, even before the vision itself is fully crafted. Spend time with your family, and other cottagers, talking about your dreams, aspirations,

or needs. Search the Internet, pick up some cottage magazines at your bookstore, or visit your local library for current books on greening. Do not overlook the children's section at the library; it is teeming with informative and practical books to engage younger cottagers too. (See the download kit included with this book for many resources you may wish to explore.)

Gain insights from your cottage neighbors. What community greening actions are happening at their cottages and in the community, particularly with respect to waste management? Think about how you can improve your own greening habits, or how you can fit into the current eco-friendly culture of your cottage neighborhood. A place for you to take immediate action may appear as you re-examine your recycling habits. Think about how you can:

- Reuse.
- Repair.
- Repurpose.
- Multipurpose.

Of course, with practicing to reduce recyclables comes other realizations. Perhaps your shopping habits will take on a noticeable change. Purchases with reduced packaging, or better still, no packaging at all, may become your choices. When quality items, such as stainless steel and wooden garden tools are purchased, they will long outlive cheaper plastic tools that you may be tempted to buy. A minimalist cottage lifestyle may be something worth exploring, too.

Start to reduce your trash. Reducing the trash that ends up in our overused landfill sites also reduces the harmful toxins and greenhouse gases polluting our air and contaminating our water supplies. Think about how your actions to reduce recyclables, or to make environmentally conscious shopping choices, will influence the crafting of your cottage greening vision. (There is more in Chapter 2 about common greening practices.)

5. Crafting Your Cottage Greening Vision Statement

Once you've decided on your greening goal at your cottage or vacation property — you have reflected upon your lifestyle and environmental

values, you have started to reduce your recyclables (or other greening actions), and you have set your sights on your desired cottage lifestyle or experience — you can begin working on your Cottage Greening Vision Statement.

Set out with the end in mind, which means understand and reflect upon your greening goal, the foundational target for your greening vision.

Your vision will put meaning and context to your goal. Once again ask yourself: How will my vision describe how my greening goal at the cottage looks, sounds, and feels?

Collectively ponder and reflect on your ideal cottage lifestyle and your developing vision. Put your greening vision into words, and be prepared to revisit and to revise until everyone comes to an agreeable understanding.

After this often exhausting process, it is well worth sharing your vision. Allow the artist at your cottage, if you have one, to creatively represent your vision, or frame and hang it in your cottage to celebrate your collective efforts and for ongoing reference and reflection.

Or maybe you are more interested in going digital and would rather upload your greening vision to a shared file on a cloud, or create your own cottage greening website or blog.

Tips for crafting your own greening vision:

- Revisit and rethink your greening goal: What is this all about?
- Brainstorm: How will our greening lifestyle look, sound, and feel at our cottage?
- Mind map or explore possible vision statements.
- Reflect and revise.
- Come to consensus.
- Represent, or put into words, your Cottage Greening Vision.

Your Cottage Greening Vision Statement needs to be valued by all who contributed to its development, and by all who frequent your cottage. It is everyone's responsibility to share the commitment which will be involved in the work and the learning along your greening journey.

Example I A Cottage Greening Vision Statement

A gift of nature and place; a place of stewardship, sustainability, and solitude.

Creating a lifestyle of curiosity, respect, creativity, and stewardship,
for our children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren ...

Living a "green" environmentally friendly ethos is envisioned as we connect
with nature, deepen our understandings, nurture our spirits,
and refurbish our little island cottage in its big forest.

Keep in mind that collectively, every Cottage Greening Vision has the potential to count towards a sustainable lifestyle, and a healthier environment! Your next steps in the process of planning for and taking action to green your cottage, inside and out, will involve taking stock. Now that you know what your goals and your vision are, an inventory of the building construction and materials, the finishing features and installations, and your current cottage greening habits will be examined in the following chapter so you can act upon them later.

