

The Daily Gleaner

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By Sonya Hull

Creating a Sustainable Cottage Life

There is a long history of summer cottage life in North America but, in the early days, no one gave much thought to the environmental impact of cottage living because society's notion of 'the Environment' hadn't yet been created. Forests, lakes, and pristine fields were abundant and ready to be taken over for our weekend pleasure – but we were largely ignorant about the need to care for them. We cut trees without thinking. We soaped up in the lake, and washed our dogs and boats too. We spilled gas filling our engines and threw garbage, old furniture, appliances, and other unwanted stuff in “the woods”. It wasn't that we didn't care, we just didn't know better. And we certainly didn't know how it would all turn out. Today, our natural cottage environments are under considerable stress.

Canadian author and long-time Algonquin Park cottager Roy MacGregor wrote this in Cottage Life Magazine a decade ago: “The lake, much to our collective shock, has become the latest layer of suburb – the very notion of which the cottage was intended to offer both escape and protection from.” The article went on to state that “even more troubling was the dark under-layer of urbanization: pollution of the water and air, loss of habitat for wild animals and, as lakes got busier and busier, a creeping lack of civility among neighbours. Over time, it became difficult to ignore a growing sense of unease.”

Now ten years later, environmentally friendly practices have become part of a regular routine at home, but are we doing as good a job or better at the cottage? There is no getting around it, having an additional property brings with it an increased environmental footprint.

But the lure of the summer cottage is strong - a special place where people live a little closer to nature - a place for peace, quiet, and relaxation. To this end, keeping our environment around the cottage low-maintenance and natural, we further enhance the uncomplicated satisfaction we get out of cottage life. Here are some tips on how to minimize the strain on your cottage environment:

- When building a new cottage, leave a natural, undeveloped buffer strip between the lake shore and the developed area. This area will provide wildlife habitat, protect water quality and give you greater privacy.
- When putting on a new roof or replacing an old one, consider using a long-lasting metal roof.
- When creating or rebuilding a deck or outdoor stairs, consider using cedar or a recycled plastic wood product that won't need painting or staining.

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- If you are renovating consider salvaging and reusing any materials that you can; and if you are refurbishing, buying used on www.kijiji.ca is the way to go!
- Use biodegradable soaps to protect the water quality; and avoid antibacterial products and strong cleaners that impede natural bacteria growth in the waste-water system.
- Take immense care when pouring gas into boats on land or near the water.

New Brunswick Day is a perfect time to re-commit to our lands both at home and on the shore, and tread lightly as we go.

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