

Royston House Bed and Breakfast, Feature Article

By Kristin Mulholland

Ross and Nancy Munro take the road less travelled. Intending to live in harmony with nature, they have initiated a local conservation effort in their own backyard in Royston, which has resulted in recognition by the Canadian Wildlife Federation.

Their backyard is not typical of manicured lawns and evenly spaced annual flowers in prepared beds. It is rather like a walk through a nature trail in the untouched coastal Comox Valley region. Great stands of red osier dogwood and pacific ninebark, overarching big leaf maples with cascading liquorice fern. "We purchased the property in 2001," says Ross, "and since then we have followed the natural slope of the land to create a bog and a drainage system. We've enhanced the natural stream and cultivated moss-covered rocks."

The 2-acre property has been designated a Certified Backyard Habitat by the Canadian Wildlife Federation. The Certification Program allows individuals to have their property officially designated as wildlife friendly. To become certified, properties must foster growth of native plants and be free of pesticides while meeting the basic needs of wildlife — food, water, shelter and space. "There are apple trees on the property that are over 80 years old. We keep one of them just for the resident birds. They feed on the fruit during the winter months," says Nancy.

A Vancouver Island ecotourism destination, the natural habitat has been enhanced with over 200 varieties of rhododendrons, a fern garden, and a herb garden. The Munro's collect rainwater and create natural soil amendments by composting. "We use the fall leaves as mulch; we don't water the lawn, we have no grass clippings, and we use no chemical insecticides or herbicides."

Living in harmony with nature and respecting the natural processes of the land by allowing the gardening process to evolve naturally over the years is part of the Munro's lifestyle.

Prior to moving to the Comox Valley, the Munro's were certified organic blueberry farmers. While Ross acts as a voluntary consultant for several organic blueberry farms on Vancouver Island, the couple's current endeavour is hosting the Royston House, a carriage suite bed and breakfast.

The Royston House was thoughtfully designed and crafted with a carriage suite in mind and is a comfortable, natural choice for both vacationers with children and West Coast outdoor excursionists. Amenities include two queen beds, an extra long single bed, an in-suite infrared sauna and a crib.

The Munro's welcome children and infants. "We've designed the amenities with families in mind. This would be a perfect getaway where children can explore the natural surroundings and gain an appreciation for nature in a safe environment."

Fostering appreciation for natural ecosystems is part of the Munro's core values. The Royston House is a place where the needs of people and wildlife are met together in harmony with the natural surroundings. "Many of our guests are looking for a place with a real West Coast feel." A popular stopover on the way to Mount Washington, the region's ski resort, many travellers enjoy the hospitality

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of Ross and Nancy along their tour of Vancouver Island's gardens. "Guests are treated to the beauty of the Comox Valley's shoreline environment, which is along a major migratory bird route.

Realizing that we are all part of the natural environment around us, the Munro's live a lifestyle according to these guiding principles:

- Allowing the gardening process to evolve naturally over time
- Changes to the landscape made in harmony with nature
- Actively choosing to be carbon neutral
- Respecting the natural process of the land

As urban and suburban neighbourhoods grow, wildlife habitat can be compromised. In an effort to replace some of this natural habitat in their own backyard, the Munro's have initiated this new approach to gardening. You are welcome to visit the Royston House on the web at <http://roystonhouse.ca>.