

Using Trees and Vegetation to Soundscape Our Precious Communities.

Forty-five million people live, work, or go to school within 300 feet of a major traffic highway. I am one of them. I live in an apartment building set back a bit from the Wampanaog Trail [Rte. 114] in Riverside. The background roadway traffic that functioned as a 'white noise' when I first moved in 14 years ago has escalated into a motorcar raceway. Heavy trucks, turbocharged sport cars and race-rocket motorcycles featuring amplified motor and exhaust produce a barrage of unnecessary loud sound. Amplified engine sounds are used in some internal combustion sportscars to project power by capturing engine noise and broadcasting them through interior and exterior speakers. Macho, artificial **un**intelligence at its zenith! Engineered for aggressive sounds, chambered exhaust systems turn the term 'muffler' into an oxymoron. One large heavy-duty truck can generate a din ten times louder than the average passenger sedan.

Nothing represents this absurdity of modern-day life, more than the avian couple of ospreys who nest on an elevated platform at the Exxon Mobil fuel storage depot just north of Forbes Street. As my nearby summertime neighbors, they migrate back up North to roost close to their fishing grounds of upper Narragansett Bay but are bombarded by highway sounds of speeding traffic at the entrance of the depot where large tanker trucks rumble by to load up on their inflammable cargoes. Excessive noise affects human health and wildlife. Adults suffer from panicky heart palpitations, anxiety, lack of focus, insomnia, and children have higher levels of cognitive impairment. Noise pollution is an insidious threat to animals because it alters the crucial natural soundscape that wildlife depends upon for their survival. It often interferes with their communication and hearing that is necessary for breeding, parenting, hunting, safety, foraging----as well as causing physiological stress to an individual.

Natural features can reduce gratuitous sounds. An expanse of grass or spreading ground cover as a perimeter border absorbs sound especially after a snowfall or heavy rain when its soil is blanketed or waterlogged. Vegetation can muffle sound especially dense groves of foliage that can provide beauty, texture, and screening for privacy, as well as acting as a noise baffle. Fast growing trees selected for sound abatement add to any garden or home landscape. Tall trees with thick, broad growth from top to bottom, with girthy trunks of rough bark are best and remember evergreens also offer year-round benefits. Some excellent choices for New England that can grow into hedgerows, perimeter borders and

thick vegetative stands include bamboo, Leyland cypress, forsythia, wax myrtle, arborvitae, fir, privet, pine, spruce, laurel, and American holly.

Silence is *golden* but as gardeners we also know its sheen is brightest when it tinges a bit verdant green.

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October 28, 2025.