



Over the Garden Gate

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President's Corner

Water Wise Landscaping - The Drought Continues

After touring the yard today and looking at a hill full of blooming daffodils, a nice patch of fragrant hyacinths, and a cherry tree that has already finished blooming, I must agree with the weather reports: winter appears to be over. Even some of the cherry blossoms in Washington D.C. are in full bloom. Heavens, it is much too early.

While we have had some rain this spring, it has not been sufficient to make up for last year. The pictures on the 6:00 news a few nights ago of the trash being hauled away from Lake Lanier in large part because of the continued low water levels really emphasized that Hall County remains in a severe drought.

The 2010 GA Water Stewardship Act required local ordinances to restrict outdoor water use for landscapes between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. daily. After July 2012, changes were also put in place updating plumbing codes regarding low-flow showers and low flush toilets.

Senate Bill 370
http://www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/2009_10/sum/sb370.htm

Per the EPA, the average American household uses 320 gallons of water per day. About 30% of that is devoted to outdoor use. Ripping out all of your plants and converting to cacti is really not necessary.



So what *can* you do to cut down on the water requirements for your yard?

1. Minimize water use with the right plant, right place approach. Think landscaping in zones.
 - a) Frequent watering in high-visible areas such as the front and back doors. (10%)
 - b) Occasional watering with plants that need wa-

by Liz Dietz

ter to establish, then only when there is a lack of rain (30%)
c) Infrequent watering with plants that are drought tolerant and can survive from rainfall only (60%)
d) Mulch, mulch, mulch

2. Know your soil and amend as necessary.
3. Consider installing a rain barrel. A 20' by 20' roof area during a 1 inch rain generates 154 gallons of runoff water.

After living in California and surviving an 8 year drought, we had to remodel the house and completely re-landscape the yard to cut back on our water use. When we started pulling out the landscaping the neighbors were convinced we were crazy but they started speaking to us again after about 2 or 3 years.

It shall hopefully start raining again, but look at what a beautiful new landscape you will have if you plant the water-wise way.

Write for Us!

Like to write? Have something to say? Your fellow master gardeners want to hear from you! Email Rick at rsfreeland@charter.net for details.

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Gardens of Sensory Delight

by Rick Freeland

A visitor's first impression of your garden comes through the sense of sight. But well-designed landscapes often offer more than eye candy. They engage all the senses.

When people talk about gardens, one of the first things mentioned is how beautiful they are. Visual elements are important, but gardens that leave lasting impressions appeal to *all* the senses - sight, smell, hearing, touch, and even taste.

In *The Essential Garden Design Workbook*, (2004 Timber Press, Inc.), landscape designer Rosemary Alexander says the most important role plants play in a garden is visual, but cautions gardeners not to overlook their other sensory qualities when selecting them.

Visual Appeal of Well Designed Gardens

Landscapes resonate with people in many ways. The shape and form of plants - and their arrangement - serves to unite and balance garden spaces. When selecting plants for form, think year-round appeal. Make sure the plant is attractive in its winter silhouette.

A plant's height and width coupled with dark or light foliage can induce certain moods. For example, if the plants in your garden overgrow the space, claustrophobia may ensue.

To create harmony, place landscape plants in balanced, proportional groupings. You can achieve bold, confident effects by repeating groups of balanced plantings.

Introduce varying textures within plant groupings. A plant's leaves are its dominant textural feature, defined by the leaf's margin (from smooth to fine to course toothed or lobed) and surface finish (rough or smooth). Contrast textures to create visual delight.

Color, especially seasonal color, is one of the most important elements for visual appeal. Color palettes should complement or contrast with the building's architecture and the background, depending on the overall desired effect.

Think about color in conjunction with seasonal succession when choosing plants, and not just in flowers. Bark, fruit and fo-

liage color should work with flower color for a year-long visual treat.



Scent and Fragrance in the Landscape

Walk through your garden after a rain. The air is filled with the heady aroma of growing things. "Green" seems to have its own smell; for avid gardeners, the scent of moist earth is ambrosia.

Mention fragrance in the garden and most gardeners think of roses, but many other plants contribute delightful scents. Gardenias (*Gardenia jasminoides*) planted next to a stoop can be a wonderful sensory experience in early summer. Summersweet (*Clethra alnifolia*) and magnolia (*Magnolia grandifolia*) are other fragrant plants. Daphne (*Daphne odora*) is intensely fragrant and, used next to a doorway, can be heavenly. Various herbs contribute their scents to the mix as well.

Watch out for stinky plants. Don't plant a female ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*) as its fruit is messy and smells awful. Some gardeners consider the herb *Salvia sclarea* (Clary Sage) to be a plant with questionable odor - according to Ms. Alexander, it has the fragrance of "smelly socks".



Garden Sounds

Sound influences mood. The soft sigh of a breeze through leaves is relaxing. Storm winds raging through those same trees can be frightening. A gentle breeze through reeds creates a rattling sound, entirely different from the sound made as it blows through adjacent ornamental grasses. Some plants, like the Golden Rain tree (*Koelreuteria paniculata*), produce seed pods

that make distinctive sounds when stirred by the breeze.

Use plants that attract birds. The soft twitter of bird song is one of nature's most delightful choruses.

And don't forget the soothing sounds of moving water. Gardeners can introduce water sound effects into their landscapes by building fountains or waterfalls, or installing a tinkling rain chain.

Like fragrance, some sounds can be intrusive. Use vegetative buffers like Leyland Cypress (*Cupressus x lelandii*) to create sound barriers that mute noise pollution.



Design Gardens for Tactile Appeal

Who doesn't like to run their fingers over soft ornamental grass plumes? Or caress the silky leaves of Lamb's Ear (*Stachys byzantina*)? Touching can be a sensuous experience, and every gardener should introduce plants that provide tactile pleasure. Leaves can be smooth or rough to the touch, as can bark.

Use plants with prickly spines, like Yucca and Japanese Barberry (*Barberis thunbergii*), to deter unwanted guests, both animal and human. Garden flora with spikes and thorns used as boundary plantings say "stay away!" in unmistakable terms.

Learn all you can about the plants you want to feature in their garden. Be wary of plants like *Hellebore*s (including Lenten Rose) which contain toxic sap that can irritate skin. Handle such plants with care. Use gloves, especially with plants used for cut flowers or where there's a danger of sap contacting skin.

Tasty Garden Delights

Gardens designed for sensory delight should also include food plants like herbs, nut-bearing trees, berry canes, fruit trees and even vegetables. Consider planting a grape vine trained to a trellis, or blackberry bushes in a back corner.

Or plant a Redbud tree (*Cercis canadensis*) - gardener Felder Rushing, in his book *Tough Plants for Southern Gardens*, (2003 Cool Springs Press), says the flowers taste just like raw peanuts, and suggests gardeners "...imagine them on a crisp, homegrown salad".

Starving for space? Many plants, like strawberries, can be grown in containers. Or construct a raised bed in a sunny place for a compact kitchen garden replete with herbs, tomatoes, and greens.

There's a trade-off when growing food plants - wildlife like them, too. You should acknowledge the higher maintenance requirements and plan accordingly.

Some plants, like the Daphne mentioned above, are toxic if ingested. Daphne, Carolina Jessamine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*) and other poisonous plants are acceptable, but be aware - and educate everyone using your garden - of inherent dangers.

Think twice about using toxic plants where young children may come in contact with them.



With a little planning, you can create a landscape masterpiece that appeals to *all* the senses - a wonderful retreat for friends, families, and neighbors for years to come.

What the Heck?

Spring Ephemerals

Plants that emerge quickly in spring, then retreat underground after a short period of growth and reproduction. At the first hint of warm weather, ephemerals emerge, leaf out, bloom, and go to seed. Then they die back, ready to rest till their next spring encore. Bloodroot, Trout Lily and Trillium are some favorites.

In Search of the Perfect Turf

by Hugh Kollmer

The four turf grasses common in our region are Fescue, Bermuda, Centipede and Zoysia. All of these grasses have advantages and disadvantages, but which is the best choice for *your* yard?

Fescue

Fescue is classified as a Cool Season Grass, while the others are considered Warm Season Grasses. Unlike Warm Season Grasses, which become dormant during the winter, Fescue consistently remains green throughout the year.



While warm season grasses, favored by our climate, dominate the landscape, many lawns feature fescue grass, either the tall or red varieties. Fescue's other advantages are its significant tolerance to shade, much more so than Warm Season Grasses. The plant's disadvantages include the demand for maintenance, a need for adequate soil moisture and a susceptibility to disease.

A Fescue lawn can be established either by seed or sod. Fertilizer should be applied in the fall, winter and spring.

Bermuda

Among our Warm Season Grasses, Bermuda is the most common species. Hybridizing has successfully produced improved varieties

which are less susceptible to disease and perhaps possess slightly more shade tolerance. This grass, which can be established from seed or sod, does best in full sun.



Bermuda grass is quite drought tolerant and disease resistant. However, it has an invasive nature, sending rhizomes traveling to places they are not wanted. By fertilizing this grass four times during its growing season and otherwise keeping it properly maintained, Bermuda grass will produce a dense, weed deterrent turf.

Feed Bermuda grass in the spring when it's 50% green, and every six weeks thereafter until mid-September. Mow it to a height of not more than two inches and ensure that your mower blades are sharp so that they cut cleanly.

Zoysia

Gaining in popularity, Zoysia grass lawns, are frequently touted as the cure-all for the homeowner's lawn cares. A basic fact about Zoysia grass is that unless it is grown in the right climate, it will cause more headaches than not.

Zoysia Grass advantages are drought tolerance, moderate shade tolerance and ability to choke out competing weeds. Its main

disadvantage is its invasiveness, taking over flower beds and neighbors' lawn.

In addition, it is susceptible to Zoysia Patch, Rhizoctonia Large Patch, Leaf Spot and Brown Patch diseases. Once established, whether from sprigs or sod, this grass is virtually impossible to eradicate.

Fertilize Zoysia in the spring when it when it is 75% green and every seven weeks thereafter until mid-September when a Winterizer fertilizer may be applied.



Centipede Grass

Also gaining in popularity, Centipede Grass is a low, medium textured, slow growing, but aggressive grass that can produce dense, attractive, weed-free turf. It is more shade tolerant than Bermudagrass but less shade tolerant than St. Augustine and Zoysia grass.

Since Centipede produces only surface runners, it is easily controlled. It ranks between Bermuda grass and St. Augustine grass in leaf width, shoot density, and stem size. Since it is slow growing, it takes longer than Bermuda and St. Augustine to completely cover an area.

Adding to Centipede's popularity is its adaptability to low fertility conditions

and its low maintenance requirements. Where Centipede grass is adapted and properly managed, it has few serious pest and disease problems. It is particularly well adapted to sandy, acid soil.

Top rated varieties are: 'TifBlair', 'Oaklawn' and 'Tennessee Hardy'. Centipede can be established from either seed or sprigs.

St. Augustine

St. Augustine grass is tough, with a coarse texture. Its advantages include shade tolerance and the ability to spread rapidly from stolons. Once established, its dense sod will effectively deter weed development. It also withstands normal foot traffic well.

Disadvantages of St Augustine include poor drought tolerance and color retention. It is also susceptible to damage by Southern Chinch Bug, Leaf Spot, Brown Patch and St. Augustine Decline (SAD).



Fertilize St. Augustine grass in spring when the grass is 50% green and every six weeks thereafter until mid-September.

Preferred varieties are: Floratam, Raleigh and Palmetto. St. Augustine grass can be established from seed, sod or plugs.

Tulip Mania

by Liz Dietz

After the latest freeze and the resulting damage to the flowers that bloomed early, most of us are eager for a return to spring. Nothing says spring better than a big bed of blooming Tulips like you see in a Tulip Festival. The one in the picture is at the Atlanta Botanical Garden which occurs during March and April.



Actually, Tulip Festivals are held all over the world, mostly in North America, in cities with a Dutch heritage. Most people associate bulbs, especially tulips, with Holland, aka the Netherlands, but they are not native to Western Europe at all. Records show trade occurring be-

tween the Austrian Emperor and the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire in the early 1500's, for flowers growing in the gardens of Adrianople.



Scholars now believe that the Turks have been cultivating tulips since as early as AD 1000. Due to the expense, they were limited to royalty.

Tulips were introduced into Holland in the early 1600's. Their popularity reached its pinnacle in 1636-1637. This period was known as *tulip mania*, with speculators selling and reselling promissory notes guaranteeing future delivery of bulbs. The Dutch

government enforced economic controls on the "tulip wind trade" in 1637 and Holland became the main source for this much sought-after bulb all over Western Europe.

^{1,2}

Some of the largest tulip growers are actually in the northern US, with the largest one, run by a Dutch farmer, located in Stevensburg, Virginia.

All bulbs are grown hydroponically. A list of the "Top 7 Most Beautiful Tulip Farms in America" by *Country Living* shows all but one farm is located on the west coast. The other is in Texas.



We have been to the Wooden Shoe Tulip Farm in Oregon and it is absolutely beautiful.

Another good place to visit is Holland, MI



Sources:

1.

<https://www.lib.umn.edu/bell/tradeproducts/tulips/>; Tulips: University of Minnesota Libraries

2. Carolus Clusius, *Rario-rum plantarum historia*. Antwerp: Plantin, 1601

Growing Peppers

by Rick Freeland

Peppers are a delight in the garden. They're used in salads or salsas, or eaten raw. Growing from certified disease free seedlings is best. Set out after the last spring frost, and take care to cover the vulnerable plants if a late frost is predicted.

Plant 18" to 24" apart in sandy loam soil at a pH of 6.2 -7. Soil should drain well, as peppers hate wet feet. But they *love* the sun, so place them in a spot that receives 6 to 8 hours of sunlight a day.

Throw a little 5-10-10 in the planting hole, and water right after planting. Provide 1 to 2" water per week, more as the season heats up, along with a supplemental dash of 5-10-10 or a liquid fertilizer boost when blossoms appear. Take care not to over fertilize. Mulch with chopped leaves or straw to preserve moisture.

As plants mature, you may need to stake them to support heavily-laden branches.

During the growing season, watch out for cut-

worms, tomato hornworms, and borers. Control with *Bacillus thuringensis*. Use rotenone and pyrethrum for pests like weevils, leaf miners and aphids.

Bacterial leaf spot and bacterial wilt are the most troublesome pepper diseases.

Most peppers mature in 60 to 90 days, though some hot varieties may take up to 150. Flavors enhance as peppers change color from green to yellow, orange and red. Vitamin content also

improves. Bells and roasting peppers may not maximize fruit production until late in the season, so plant two plants of each type. One is to eat on throughout the season. Leave the other to mature, change color and gift you with the best flavor peppers. Thin walled varieties mature earlier.

Peppers can be used as companion plants with tomatoes, parsley, basil and carrots, but don't plant with fennel or kohlrabi. They can also be used as ornamental specimens in planting beds.