



# Cultivated News

Nature Scapes  
INC.

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## Making A Case For Landscape Renovation: Part 3

— Rick Barnes

Selecting the proper plant for a particular site is absolutely critical to successful landscaping anywhere, and is one of the elements that makes what I do for Nature Scapes both fun and challenging.

In the 2 preceding parts of this series, we talked about what conditions influence the need for a landscape to be renovated, certain progressions in landscape growth that necessitate change, why some approaches to landscape development are better than others (in terms of minimizing renovation over the long haul), and ways of reducing landscape renovation expense by effectively removing stages in the landscape progression.

### Pick The Right Plants To Begin With

It is easy to see why plant selection permeates this whole process. For example, let's say our landscape includes a tree island and a surrounding lawn of Bermuda turf. We know from what we have already discussed that in a few years those trees in the island are going to begin to shade the turf, sending roots out beyond the bedline to compete for water and nutrients — unless we selected a dwarf tree variety that would remain within the boundaries of that island! Alternatively, we could have selected a different type of turf (such as Fescue) which has a higher tolerance for shade.

As you can see, knowing what plant to select in the first place can really make a difference in the long-term performance of a landscape — and your satisfaction with that landscape!

### Know What You're Looking For

Let's look at another example. Say you live in a condominium and desire to minimize the heat sink factor of your parking lots by creating shade. You are presented with 4 choices of plants: Sycamore, Crape Myrtle, Crab Apple, and Oriental Elm. You want shade and low maintenance for the long term, and yet you don't want to wait 20 years to shade those parking areas!

We can very quickly eliminate 2 of the choices: The Sycamore, while excellent for shade and fast growing, produces leaves the size of magazine covers and wood which readily breaks in storms. The Crab Apple, a beautiful flowering tree,

produces messy fruits late in the season which will drop on automobiles and litter the parking lot. A better choice would be the Crape Myrtle which also flowers beautifully, and yet the fruits are much more manageable. However the best choice of the four is the Oriental Elm, a strong-wooded, relatively fast-growing, low-maintenance shade tree with small leaves and inconspicuous fruits that are easy to clean up. (There are other good choices for such a situation also.)

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This points to the vital relationship among landscape contractors, nurserymen and educators — all of whom are constantly in search of new and useful plant varieties. I could fill another entire article with a discussion of the many wonderful plant varieties which have emerged over the last 15 years. Instead I'll offer 2 or 3 examples, to show how important they are in the urban landscape.

### Creative Solutions To Space Restriction

The limiting factor in most of today's urban landscaping is space — there is simply less room in the clustered residential and commercial developments where land is so expensive. However, the nursery trade has answered this challenge with dwarf forms of some favorite landscape plants:

The "Little Gem" Magnolia for example is the smallest form of Southern Magnolia developed to date, with a full grown height of about 20 feet and a spread of 8-12 feet. Southern Magnolias normally grow 3 to 4 times that size.

A lot of work has also been done with Crape Myrtles at the U.S. National Arboretum in Washington, D.C. Numerous new varieties have been developed there, many for insect and disease resistance and still others for size, form, color and decorative bark. Many years ago, the arboretum came out with

2 new varieties: "Natchez," a widely used Crape Myrtle with beautiful bark and white flowers and "Muscogee" a lavender flowered variety. These have been great plants for the Atlanta landscape, but at a full grown size of 30 feet, too large for smaller areas.

Recently, the National Arboretum introduced more varieties of Crape Myrtle to answer the demand for smaller-sized flowering trees. "Lipan," for example, is a dwarf lavender, and "Osage" is a dwarf pink. These trees top out at 15 feet tall. (For more on Crape Myrtles, see "Stop The Violence!" in this issue, page 4. — Ed.)

### Other "Dwarf" Varieties

While I have only used trees as examples, the notion of proper plant selection is vital to all plant categories. "G.L. Tabor" Azalea can reach a height and spread of 6-8 feet in metro Atlanta. On the other end of the scale, "Gumpo" Azaleas seldom get over 1 foot tall, but may spread 2-3 feet. At 9 feet tall, dwarf Burford Holly may not seem so dwarf, but compared to the 30-35 foot Burford, it is.

Plant selection is a critical issue in both initial planning and installation of the landscape, as well as when the time comes to renovate. Careful attention to this can result in smooth transitions from initial installation to maturity.

## The Unforgettable Winter of '96

On March 10, 1996 Winter rebounded in Georgia after a spell of Spring-like weather that brought trees, shrubs and warm season lawns out of their winter dormancy.

Temperatures plummeted to 12° Fahrenheit, an extremely low reading for a critical stage in plant growth.

Many of the adverse effects of the freeze became immediately apparent. Bradford Pears, Saucer Magnolias and other early spring flowering trees and shrubs showed immediate flower and foliage damage. Pansies, which had been constantly kept from blooming by the persistent cold were dealt a final blow.

### Latent Damage

As the days and weeks following the freeze went by, the real devastation became evident. Warm season lawns, especially Bermuda, exhibited severe winter kill since the warm temperatures preceding the freeze had caused them to break dormancy. Some of these lawns, especially newly sodded ones, would not recover. This sparked an ongoing controversy over the appropriateness of laying dormant sod and who should shoulder the responsibility for the wrath of mother nature.

Shrubs and perennials that are normally quite cold-hardy succumbed to the cold as well. Abelia, Azaleas, Chrysanthemums and many others gave in to the frigid

temperatures, especially plants that had just been installed.

We think we have yet to see the end of the March freeze of '96. As the cold gave way to an extended period of hot, dry weather in May and June, other plants in the landscape, especially Cherry Trees, began to show signs of dieback. This is evidence of something we must keep in mind when dealing

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# Evergreens, for a Winter ‘Welcome’

— Cynthia Upchurch

From wraparound porches to city stoops, the threshold is a wonderful area to display planters that bear greetings to all. The season dictates what blooming foliage to plant in our outdoor containers. Therefore, we are somewhat limited with choices during the winter months. Why not use beautiful evergreens? They make a great impact at your door, yet they're easy to change.

Evergreens allow a wide variety of looks for every home. Choosing the right evergreen for a container is a matter of personal taste and the plant's requirements. No less important is the plant's ultimate size and shape.

## Care And Feeding

A potted plant is in a limited growing area and more or less depends on you for survival. Try using a heavier soil mix for pots in full sun. This will assist the soil from drying out as quickly. Of course, good drainage is always critical. Make sure your container has drainage holes. Place a few large pieces of gravel or broken pottery over the holes to keep drainage flowing.

Fertilizing a container-grown plant is essential, but be careful not to overdo it. Rotate your container every month to avoid a lopsided growth pattern.

## Containers

When choosing a container, keep in mind whether it's the right size for the plant of your choice. A few types are wooden planters, concrete and terra-cotta. Concrete seems to be the best to withstand cold temperatures and gives good root protection. Terra-cotta planters can be sealed inside to avoid cracking during hard freezes, however this defeats the favorable characteristic of breathing that it allows. Wooden planters look nice when painted a dark color. The neat thing about wooden planters is that you can slip a plant in a plastic pot inside them.

Below are a few suggestions for winter planting. (Keep in mind that all container-grown plants need some protection from the cold and need rainfall on foliage to help discourage pest problems.)

**American Boxwoods** — A dignified shrub, lending elegance to any setting, the American Boxwood has year-round dense, green foliage. However, the plant has low resistance to disease and is not very drought-tolerant.

**Hybrid Hollies** — As these plants are disease-resistant and drought-tolerant, they make a good substitute for Boxwood. Many selections are available, a number of which produce bright red berries and glossy leaves with few spines. Foliage varies from light to dark green.



**Dwarf  
Hinoki Cypress**

**Rockspray Contoneaster** — These charming plants enjoy full sun, bearing bright red berries in fall. In spring, expect white blooms tinged with pink. We suggest pruning to thin. This shrub grows to a height of 2-3 feet, with a spread of 5-8 feet. Its fine texture combines well with stone or wood.

**Dwarf Hinoki Cypress** — Irregularly twisted and tufted, these shrubs give a bonsai effect. Well-suited to containers, Dwarf Hinoki Cypress is slow-growing and shade-tolerant. Its foliage is scalelike, dense and somewhat twisted. This shrub has the added advantage of requiring no pruning.

**Junipers** — Very durable for containers, most Junipers enjoy full sun and are drought-tolerant. Selections include upright, topiary and spreading. The Pfitzer Juniper, for example, grows in a loose and graceful form. Dwarf versions vary from *Armstrongii* with yellowish foliage and soft, scale-like leaves to *Glauca* which produces a silvery blue foliage that becomes purple-blue in winter.

**Southern Indica Azalea Tree Types** — Long-lived and evergreen, these familiar bushes produce lovely spring blooms in a variety of colors. Spreading or upright, Azalea shrubs grow well in sun or shade.

## Choosing A Plant Base

To help balance some evergreens (especially tree types) try planting variegated ivy around the base of the plant. Ivy will tolerate sun or shade. Another idea for base growth would be evergreen ferns. However ferns do require shade.

One more unique idea is to use wire forms to train your ivy or use Carolina Jessamine. Either will grow along the wire form you choose. The Carolina Jessamine will have a yellow flower in the spring. Using a wire form allows you to create the look of a tree or shrub.

Winter doesn't have to put an end to our beautiful containers! Try your own ideas with evergreens and offer your front door, garage door and verandahs year-round appeal.

**Front Row (L/R):** Luis Robles – Cross Creek Route Mgr., Rick Upchurch – President, Pam Lasota – Accounting Mgr., Mike Williams – Design & Sales. **Middle Row (L/R):** Rodney Anderson – Chemical Division Mgr., Dale Stephens – Commercial Route Mgr., Pete Knapik – Residential Route & Safety Mgr. **Back Row (L/R):** Marty Gignilliat – Landscape Production Mgr., David Johnson – Maintenance Division Mgr., Rick Barnes – Vice President, Jim Wages – Equipment Mgr. **Not Pictured:** Constance McCarthy – Floriculture. Division Mgr.

## Nature Scapes Plans Ways to Serve You Better

The Managers of Nature Scapes spent two days at Callaway Gardens in October for their first annual Strategic Planning Session. The session covered both short term goals and long term planning. We took an honest look at our strengths and weaknesses. It is now our goal to put those plans into action. We came away with this revised Mission Statement:

### **Mission Statement — Nature Scapes, Inc.**

Nature Scapes, Inc. is a landscape maintenance and contracting company with an emphasis on improving the horticultural environment. It is our standard to provide our clients with superior service and quality workmanship. We are constantly in pursuit of achieving perfection. The appearance of the properties we maintain and installations we perform is a direct reflection of Nature Scapes, Inc.'s pride and commitment.

We achieve our goals through the dedication of our employees by requiring them to maintain a professional appearance and attitude. We provide them with a safe and drug-free working environment, offering a competitive benefits package, including continuing education in the field of horticulture. Our on-site team is the primary link between our clients and Nature Scapes, Inc.

## *Stop the Violence!*

— *Walter Reeves, DeKalb Extension Service*

January is the cruelest month for Crape Myrtles. These smooth-skinned, multi-trunked beauties dazzled us with their flowers in June. Their bark has peeled to reveal mottled patches of gray or cinnamon underneath. Now their graceful, arching, upper branches are striking against the winter sky. Yet landscapers and homeowners alike break out their pruning tools every January to “whack back the Crapes”. Why does this annual massacre occur? Is it necessary?

Crape Myrtles bloom at the ends of branches which were produced between February and May. Many gardeners mistakenly believe that annual pruning is necessary to stimulate summer flowers. But any observer can see that Crape Myrtles which are not pruned in spring make lots of blooms in summer. Pruning in January simply forces the tree to bloom closer to the ground. By removing the spring and summer growth of the previous year, we are forcing the plant to produce new branches below the spring cuts. New growth occurs lower on the plant than it would otherwise. Therefore blooms are lower, too.

See *Violence* page 6



# Moving Forward In A Recycling-Conscious Era

— Pamela Lasota

Recycling has become a way of life. Municipalities in our area are now promoting curbside pickup of household recyclables, mandatory segregation of yard trimmings and school programs to promote environmental consciousness. The time has come for the landscape industry to take a responsible approach to recycling yard trimmings generated by their operations.

Robin Mitchell of the E.P.A.'s Solid Waste Program says, "Yard trimmings make up about 15% of the municipal solid waste disposed in the U.S. each year. By banning yard trimmings from municipal solid waste landfills, Georgia is encouraging composting which will turn what had been a waste into a useful resource." Nature Scapes estimates our maintenance operation generates 375 cubic yards of clippings per week during our peak pruning and leaf removal season.

## Nature Scapes' Role

With these numbers haunting us, Nature Scapes has made the decision to start our own yard-trimmings compost operation. "We feel extremely lucky to have land available to us that is adequate to set up our operation, properly zoned and convenient for our trucks to make a drop just 100 yards from our shop," says Rick Upchurch. "The opportunity is just too perfect to pass up."

For the last several years, Nature Scapes has been working with a national recycling company for yard waste removal, but we have never been able to make use of the end product. It is now our goal to produce two products from our operation: mulch to be used as a top dressing and compost as a soil additive and enhancement.

## Mulch Matters

As nature intended, leaf fall and organic debris act as a mulch in natural environments. On developed properties, a decision must be made to leave the property looking unsightly or to add mulch in a controlled manner. The latter seems to be the obvious preference.

By incorporating the recycled product as a mulch, we can offer our clients a number of benefits. The mulch will:

- Act as a natural weed control.
- Allow water infiltration.
- Reduce soil compaction.
- Keep benefiting the soil even after it has lost its aesthetic appeal by adding organic matter.
- Reduce erosion.
- Enhance soil moisture retention.

We plan to use the recycled mulch in beds as an alternative to pine straw or as the base with a top dressing of pine straw, reducing expenses while benefiting plants and soil. Another possible use is on paths in high-traffic areas such as tennis courts, pools, playgrounds and the like.

## Compost Charisma

Compost is a beneficial additive to soil, enhancing development of fauna and microflora, rendering the plant less vulnerable to attack by parasites and promoting faster plant root development. It increases nutrient content and turns mineral substances in soil to forms available to plants. Compost also improves soil texture, water retention and aeration capacity, resistance to wind and water erosion as well as temperature stability.

In the future, we plan to use our own product when planting any new shrubs, trees or flowers. We are pleased that this new service will benefit the environment as well as our valued clients.



*Chipping Machine at Nature Scapes' Compost and Mulch Lot — Crane (above right) dumps trimmings into bin (middle) and chips come out at left.*

# Safety Update: Preventing Back Strain

— *Pete Knapik*

Just a few things to remember when working around the house or yard: The six basic steps to lifting correctly and using proper mechanics are:

1. Get a firm footing with a wide base of support.
2. Bend the knees.
3. Tighten the stomach muscles.
4. Lift with the legs.
5. Keep the load close.
6. Keep the spine upright.

Problems arise when lifting is performed improperly and with poor body mechanics. Be sure to give your back time to rest between all the trips to the refrigerator this holiday season!

## *Winter '96 from page 2*

with living plants: the damage our plants sometimes show is more apt to result from the *cumulative effect* of freezes, droughts, extended periods of rain, and storms than it is from a single event such as the March freeze of 1996. ...Or Hurricane Opal. Remember that one?

## *Violence from page 4*

When allowed to grow without a gardener's interference, Crape Myrtles grow to their genetically determined height and then stop. Many of the Crape Myrtles which have been planted

in the last decade are the taller varieties. "Natchez," "Muscogee" and "Tuscarora" all grow 25 feet tall. In many cases, they were originally planted too close together or too close to a building. They have to be pruned each year or they would grow too large for the site.

Fortunately, several smaller varieties have been introduced recently. "Acoma," "Tonto," and "Hopi" are National Arboretum releases and are disease resistant. These trees bloom extravagantly but will not need the annual "butchering" their larger cousins receive.

## *Who We Are*

*Cultivated News* is published four times a year by Nature Scapes, Inc., for over ten years a provider of landscaping, maintenance, irrigation and floriculture services to the metropolitan Atlanta area.

Nature Scapes, Inc. is a charter member of GGIA – Georgia Green Industry Association, MALTA – Metro Atlanta Landscape & Turf Association and GTAI – Georgia Turfgrass Association, Inc. We also belong to the Southern Nurseryman's Association.

Natures Scapes, Inc. operates a drug-free workplace, as certified by the State Board of Workers' Compensation.

If you have any topics or questions you would like to see discussed or elaborated on in a future issue of this newsletter, please call and let us know.

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*Season's Greetings!*

