

## Ornamental Grasses — Natural Beauty for Large or Small Gardens

From prairies to seashores, grasses make up an integral part of our natural landscape. In recognition for their aesthetic qualities, multi-seasonal interest and ease of care, ornamental grasses are now being cultivated to provide a natural, yet elegant look to our gardens and landscapes. Most ornamental grasses are perennial. However unlike most perennials, their foliage and plumes dry rather than wither. Thus, throughout the fall and winter seasons they add a note of visual interest to an otherwise barren landscape.

Foliage colors range from variegated white and green to blue-green, red or copper, some changing in the fall to more intense colors. The plume colors are subdued but interesting, and vary all the way from pink and cream to bronze, gold and red.

When incorporating grasses into a landscape, keep a few things in mind: size of plant, both height and spread; summer and fall color; as well as growth habit, upright or drooping. Some grasses need space, like the well-known Pampas Grass. It grows ten to twelve feet in height (including plumage), with a six foot spread. The larger varieties work well as single, specimen plants while smaller grasses look great when paired with low-growing evergreen shrubs interspersed by perennials.

Grasses may be used on a larger scale to give an open area the free-flowing look of a meadow. Around a pool, ornamentals create a relaxed, informal look. The lower-growing plants may be used as a border or hedge, while some even work well as ground covers. When

— Pamela Lasota



See *Grasses* page 2

## Nature Scapes Wins Silver Award

The 1997 Silver Award from the Georgia Green Industry Association (GGIA) was given to Nature Scapes, Inc. for landscape maintenance at Paces West condominiums. Here is the text which accompanied the announcement in the *GGIA Journal*:

*Discriminating clientele that demand perfection* — this sums up the mandate for landscape maintenance at Paces West. The 20 acre site was a former mansion turned condominiums in 1980. The residents, the management company (CMA), the landscape quality control company (OLM, Inc.) and Nature Scapes Inc. are equally demanding in keeping high quality at the forefront.

Just two examples of the pursuit of perfection are the 100% edging requirement for the property and the thorough monthly inspections. The 100% edging requirement refers to the fact that all lawn edges, including curbs, walkways and beds, are mechanically edged every week. The monthly inspection involves representation from all the major players

Front Entrance at Paces West

See *GGIA Award* page 2

# Nature Scapes Maintains Two Atlanta Landmarks

Nature Scapes has added a couple of well-known properties to its maintenance schedule. The first to come on board was The Margaret Mitchell House, which we began to service on June 1, 1997.

Slightly more than one month later, we took on the turf areas inside the Atlanta Botanical Garden. This property will be a particular challenge as every type of turf grass used in Atlanta is represented there. Another cause for special care: Fall events staged by the Garden necessitate the set-up of a large circus tent on the "Great Lawn". The tent will remain over the Meyer's Zosia turf for nearly one month each year.

## Public Use

Both landmarks are subject to heavy use by the public, and this adds a note of complication to our maintenance plan. However, these accounts have been placed in the capable hands of Maintenance Manager Dale Stephens and Foreman Rusty Lee. Consistent routine maintenance and a well-coordinated horticultural program will result in the improved appearance of both properties. This will be the responsibility of Rodney Anderson in our Chemical Department.

So the next time you visit the Atlanta Botanical Garden or The Margaret Mitchell House, know that Nature Scapes has been there too!



*Margaret Mitchell House*

## GGIA Award from page 1

– CMA, OLM and Nature Scapes – in a complete property inspection of the 82 units at Paces West. The outcome of this meeting is a performance payment based on what was accomplished from previous inspections as well as the overall present appearance of the project.

David Johnson, Maintenance Manager for Nature Scapes, Inc. values these inspections to direct him and the crew in maintenance activities as well as landscape improvements. OLM does a great job in serving as a liaison between the landscape maintenance company and the property management company in that they well understand the issues which direct the activities of landscape maintenance.

Pruning, pest control and flower bed displays are other areas where perfection is demanded at Paces West. This desire demands the utilization of some of Nature Scapes' most talented people on the project. Allen Clemons and crew are under the direct supervision of David Johnson on the property. While the demands placed on Nature Scapes are

high at Paces West, the talents of the maintenance team

2 are capable of delivering an excellent product.



## Grasses from page 1

used in the proper setting, ornamental grasses provide natural interest to any area.

Cut back grasses to the ground or crown in late winter or just before new growth appears in the early spring. It is best to wear protective clothing and gloves, since foliage can be razor sharp. Most grasses prefer full sun and will thrive in diverse soil conditions: moist, dry, sandy or clay. They are fairly tough and have few pest problems, making them an attractive choice for difficult conditions. Some varieties will live in moist or boggy conditions, making a nice statement beside a pond.

There are many ornamental grasses available, each offering its own special qualities. Here are a few which grow well in our area:

***Miscanthus sinensis*** — Porcupine Grass, Japanese Silver Grass, Purpurascens Japanese Silver Grass, Zebra Grass, Variegated Japanese Silver Grass and Silver Banner Grass.

***Pennisetum alopecuroides*** — Fountain Grass, Dwarf Fountain Grass and Black Fountain Grass.

***Calamagrostis acutiflora*** — Karl Foerster Feather Red Grass.

***Carex sp. (Sedges)*** — Bird's Foot Sedge, Plantainleaf Sedge, Drooping Sedge and Leather Leaf Sedge.

***Cortaderia selloana*** — Pampas Grass (illustration page 1).

# Mother (Nature) Takes It Off!

— Rick Barnes

**T**rick-or-treaters are not the only ones removing their masks after Halloween. Trees, shrubs and many smaller plants cast off their green disguises every year to reveal rainbows of color in our landscapes. Although it is not known why the phenomenon of fall color occurs, few would disagree that it creates a whole new dimension of plant enjoyment and landscape value.

## Die to Survive

The process of autumn leaf-drop is a survival response for plants living in the temperate zones in both the Northern and Southern hemispheres. The temperate zone lies roughly between the tropics of Cancer (in the northern hemisphere) and Capricorn (in the southern hemisphere) and the nearest polar circle.

If the leaves of deciduous trees were to remain in place during the harsh winter the water inside them would turn to ice, rendering them useless for photosynthesis. That would lead to desiccation (drying out) of the plant itself and promote invasion by pest organisms. In the tropics, where freezing of leaf tissue is not a problem, leaves remain on the plant year round.

## What's Going On

Let's look inside the leaf of a typical deciduous tree, like that Red Maple, Dogwood or Crape-myrtle in your yard. There we find layers of cells which are rich in chloroplasts, sub-cellular structures containing chlorophyll. Chlorophyll is the major compound responsible for helping plants convert water and carbon dioxide into sugar and oxygen. Chloroplasts contain a majority of the green pigment which gives the leaves their color. Yet, also contained in the chloroplasts are other pigments, like carotenoids, which are yellow and orange. Since these compounds are not as abundant as chlorophyll, they are masked by chlorophyll's green coloration.

In September and October, decreasing daylight and lower temperatures trigger certain processes within each plant which cause the chlorophyll to break down. As it does, the brilliant carotenoids are unmasked and the leaves are transformed from green to beautiful shades of orange and yellow.

At the same time, plants create other pigments, known as anthocyanins, which produce the reds found in the fall color palette. Variations in pigment color — from light red to deep purple — are the result of differences in sugar content within each leaf. Some leaves, such as those of the primitive Ginkgo tree, change directly from green to yellow and show no other coloration. Others, such as the Sugar Maple, turn from green to varying hues of orange and yellow as the carotenoids are revealed, and then to red as the anthocyanins are manufactured. Even, the lowly Sweetgum tree, considered by many to be a nuisance and a weed, is often unrivaled in its brilliant display, ranging from pure yellow to red and even purple.

## Additional Variables

Other factors affecting fall color include local weather and general climate, rainfall and temperature fluctuations, latitude, altitude, exposure and the particular conditions at each site. These rather mysterious influences spark many armchair predictions about how good or bad the fall color will be each year. Some of the most brilliant displays I've seen take place in New York and New Jersey, though the Sugar Maples of New Hampshire and Vermont are thought to be beyond comparison. Simply traveling from northern Florida, through Georgia and into North Carolina one can observe a difference in the brilliance of the color.

Intensity of color will also vary from one year to the next. Last year I spoke with Walter Reeves about 2 weeks before Thanksgiving, and we marveled at the intensity and long duration of color during the autumn of 1996. "Why are the colors so incredibly beautiful this year?" he asked. We could only speculate about dry spells, rainy periods, sustained cool temperatures and the fact that the Yankees beat the Braves in the World Series! I have often observed, however, that long periods of sustained dry weather — such as we experienced in the late '80s and early '90s — tend to mute the colors of fall.

So, while Mother Nature may not reveal all of her secrets, she does reveal one last great display of color before the gray months of winter-rest. And she never fails to let us know that she has a sense of humor: If you look around carefully this fall, you just might see some of the most brilliant fall color of all on a common native plant in our area — Poison Ivy!

## Some examples of plants for fall color:

**Yellow** — Ginkgo, Tulip Poplar, Witch Hazel, Saucer Magnolia and Sugar Maple.

**Orange** — Sassafras, Sugar Maple, Red Maple (October Glory) and some Japanese Maple varieties.

**Red** — Red Maple (Red Sunset), Oak Leaf Hydrangea, Sourwood, Sweetgum and Winged Euonymus.



Red Maple



Sugar Maple



Scarlet Oak



White Oak



Buckeye

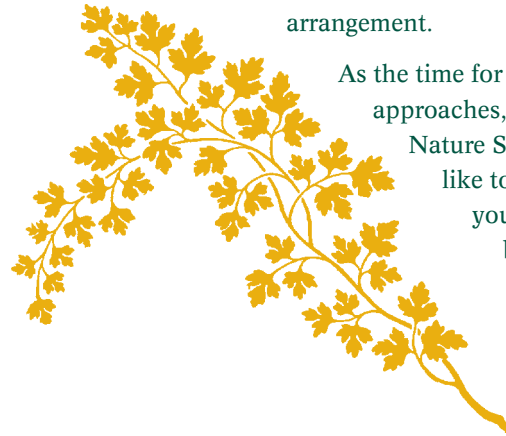
# Outdoor Clippings Bring Indoor Beauty

With the holidays coming, remember the bountiful home decorations available free of charge and just outside your own backdoor. Though late winter is the best time to prune, it's not too early to start when evergreens go dormant in mid-December. Instead of discarding that foliage, why not incorporate your cuttings into topiaries, garlands or centerpieces? — Cynthia Upchurch

For example, magnolia leaves, strips of pine and fir work well in garlands. Cuttings from elaeagnus, holly, cedar, juniper and boxwood are excellent for stuffing wreaths. This foliage also makes an attractive mix in centerpieces. Just remember to soak the cuttings overnight in a bucket of water before incorporating them into your designs. That will sustain their freshness.

## Here are a few more ideas:

- **Save the pinecones you collect all year**, then string them with floral wire into colorful ornaments.
- **Red berries from shrubs** like yaupon and aucuba can be used for vivid highlights.
- **If you own a water garden**, maybe you have lotus plants. After the flowers bloom in mid-summer, save the lotus pods. These may be spray-painted or left natural and used to add texture to any arrangement.



As the time for Thanksgiving approaches, the staff at Nature Scapes would like to thank you for your loyalty and business. Wishing you a happy holiday!

## 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.

### Nature Scapes, Inc.

1307 Turner Road • Lilburn, GA 30047  
(770) 923-7023 • Fax (770) 923-3874



Nature Scapes, Inc.  
1307 Turner Road  
Lilburn, Georgia 30047

