

## Plan a Tree — Plant a Tree

—Pamela Lasota

Trees form the backbone of our landscapes, and their benefits are innumerable. To mention a few, they provide shade and wind protection; filter dust and pollution; and create a harmonious blend between nature and architecture. Based on the benefits they provide, it becomes very important that tree selection and siting be taken seriously. Unlike planting a shrub that can easily be transplanted or removed, a tree becomes more permanent in a relatively short time and if removed will leave a stump and many roots to contend with.

Considerations when selecting a tree and site:

**Determine the Function** – Is the tree intended for shade? Light shade or dense shade? Is the tree intended as a wind buffer? Is winter sun desirable, summer sun undesirable? Is the tree intended to frame the building? Many factors should determine the form and size of the tree to be chosen.

**Evergreen or Deciduous** – The function will dictate the choice of this option. As an example, if intended to block



winter winds or allow warming sunlight, an evergreen would be used as a wind block, a deciduous tree would allow the winter sun to filter through. Consider leaf clean up if a deciduous tree is used in a manicured area.

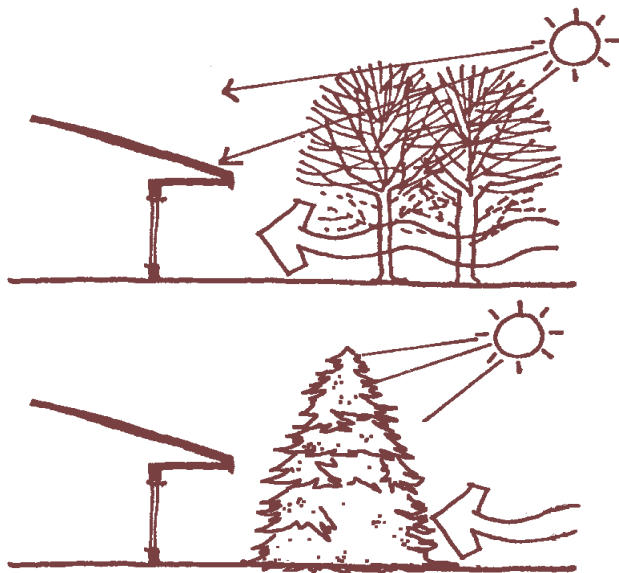
**Form** – The branching pattern will inevitably determine the shape of the mature canopy as well as the density of the canopy and its shading capabilities.

**Mature Height and Canopy** – Plant a comfortable distance from other trees, structures, sidewalks, streets, etc. Do not forget the canopy and its width at maturity.

**Location** – Be sure to locate the tree where no obstructions will interfere with its mature size. Trees planted under power lines are prone to having their canopies mutilated, while roots can get the same treatment when encroaching upon underground pipes.

**Seasonal Interest** – Blooms, fruits, fall color and bark interest should be considered and can create year-round interest. Be sure to check the “trash factor;” the Sweet Gum will drop prickly gum balls, while the other trees may produce multiple offspring by reseeding or sucker growth.

Too often, trees are planted in an area that will accommodate them only for the shortest period in their life, and on average, that should be a long life. With these factors being *only a very few to consider*, a little homework and a consultation with an experienced horticulturist, landscaper or landscape architect is recommended.



# April Showers?

—Rick Barnes

The pansies are barely settled into their winter beds, but the folks at Nature Scapes are already looking toward flowers for spring. Our growers are always letting us know that it's never too early to get the word out! This is Doug Smith of Smith Plant Factory, our primary supplier of annual color. He is holding one of the custom moss-lined hanging baskets he grew for several of his customers last spring.

So you have an idea for something special like this that you would like to do for next spring? Our floriculturist, staff, and suppliers have many creative ideas for new flowers to use and new ways to use them. If we can help you with your color ideas, call Sharon McMillian at our office. She will be happy to help you with your spring color in 1999.



## Thanks for Coming...



*We* appreciate those of you that joined us in celebrating our 15-year anniversary. The weather could not have been better for our "Pig-Out" Barbecue.

Some of our guests had to travel a good distance to attend, but we're happy that you did! It was such a pleasure for us to meet those of you that we know only by voice, over the phone.

Thanks again, for coming and helping make this such a memorable event for us.

*Cynthia Upchurch*

*In the plant world, there is a season of the year that rivals spring and fall for its flurry of activity: Pruning Season! It starts as early as mid-January and can last until early April. Granted, this is not the right time of year to be pruning every plant out there. Pruning some plants at this time of year could result in amputated flower buds, diminished growth, or worse! But for those plants that do respond well to pruning at this time of year, we'd like to introduce you to...*



# ***The Science (and the Art) of Pruning***

—Rick Barnes

## **THE REASON!**

There are many reasons for pruning — to promote flowering, to invigorate a weakened plant (a good idea after the deplorable weather conditions of 1998!) or simply to bring an overgrown plant back into the scale of its landscape setting (or, in many cases, back down below the window ledge!) But understanding the *science* of pruning is critical to proper pruning. Without it, long-term maintenance of plantings may become a nightmare, and the health of the plant may be jeopardized.

## **THE ACTION AND THE REACTION!**

Plants prefer to grow in a particular way — up! This is a physiological response within the plant to light and gravity. The botanical term for upward growth is known as apical dominance. The top shoot of the plant, the “leader” tries to remain higher on the plant than all the other shoots, the “laterals.” This leader produces auxin, a plant hormone that suppresses the growth of the laterals. If the leader is cut by pruning, the laterals begin a process of vigorous growth.

## **ONLY 2 WAYS TO PRUNE!**

In all the world of incredible diversity of plant shapes, colors, textures, flowers, and growth habits, there are still only 2 methods of pruning. The best pruning cut is a thinning cut, in which a selected shoot is completely removed all the way back to a lateral shoot or main stem. Thinning the plant in this way encourages even growth of the plant at all levels — not just the top. The other type of pruning cut is the shearing cut, in which *every* shoot, leader and laterals alike, are cut.

## **SHEARING IS FOR SHEEP — NOT FOR PLANTS!**

Taking the shears to your favorite shrub upsets the balance of nature. The plant develops, in effect, the raging hormones of a typical teenager! Every single shoot that was cut in the shearing process may produce 2-6 new shoots! Pruning in this manner necessitates re-shearing in a relatively short period of time, and the process sets up the gradual decline of the plant, unless this cycle is broken.

## **CURING THE GUMDROP SYNDROME**

I once participated in a seminar in which the speaker described “gumdrop syndrome.” I laughed because I immediately conjured up a mental picture of what he was talking about. Images of perfectly geometrical living balls of chlorophyll, adorning the yards of America, danced in my head. Gumdrop syndrome leads to a leggy, overbranched, unhealthy plant because all of the foliage is on the outside surface of the plant. All of the interior foliage is shaded out by the dense cover on the outside, and simply falls off. The plant may become susceptible to insects, disease, and decline during unfavorable weather and climate conditions. They will eventually lose that perfect gumdrop shape. Drastic corrective pruning, followed by a lengthy recovery time, will be required to regain a proper shape.

## **A METHOD TO SHEAR MADNESS?**

Despite all this negative talk about shearing, it can be a valuable pruning technique, especially in winter-pruning. Often, plants are sheared in order to restore structure or bring them back into scale of their landscape setting. However, following the shearing, the plants are then properly *thinned* to allow light and air movement within the plant canopy. As the plant grows out of this shearing/thinning double-whammy, *thinning* becomes the pruning method for ongoing maintenance. At Nature Scapes, our pruning

*(continued on back cover)*

## Who We Are

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

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

Nature 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 the newsletter, please call and let us know.

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methods are focused on plant health and aesthetics, as well as teaching people that a healthy plant is one with structure, dense foliage, and shape. But shape is *irregular* in plants — we try not to yield the gumdrop!

### ***BUT WHAT ABOUT THE ART?***

One witnesses the *art* of pruning when one sees a once overgrown Savannah Holly full, lush, well shaped and back in scale with the rest of the landscape only a short time after proper corrective pruning. Or lush new growth on an Azalea or Holly that had a bad summer last year. Even small trees such as Redbuds or Crapemyrtles appear more as sculptures in the landscape after proper thinning out of dense, criss-crossed branches. The landscape becomes an artful whole when all of the elements within it are properly fitted components of the composition.

So if this is the art, then who are the artists? The artists are the Nature Scapes foremen who exhibit their talent on your property each week — Miguel, Mauricio, Jose, and others who make pruning look easy, but whose real talent doesn't show until the plants do their part. The art directors? They come from two places. Allen and David come from Nature Scapes, but the ultimate half of the art direction comes from *you*, our customer. Either through your management company or directly from you, your input is important to us in the "art direction" of your pruning. Now that you have had the crash course in pruning, you know that thinning, rather than shear madness, is the pruning method that will provide an obtainable, maintainable, and sustainable look for your landscape!



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