



University of Georgia's Horticulture Garden Tests Plants for Performance

—Pamela Lasota

The University of Georgia's Horticulture Garden serves as a research and teaching facility that benefits students, breeders, growers, retailers and landscapers; these benefits trickle all the way down to the consumer. Each spring more than 500 different varieties are planted, as the plantings progress, data is collected on the quality and performance of plants under garden conditions.

In June, after plants have become established, the University hosts an Open House or "Open Garden" providing an opportunity for those in the industry to view the gardens. Last June, Sharon McMillian, Floriculturist for Nature Scapes and Doug Smith of Smith Plant Factory seized the opportunity to attend the Open House and shop around for new varieties to be used and, in Doug's case, grown for the Spring/Summer 1999 season. "By viewing these plants with our primary grower, we were able to see them in the critical stage of their development and discuss options for the next growing season". "It was a real treat to be able to view such a large variety of plants that are adaptable to the cultural challenges in the Metro Atlanta landscape", said Sharon when she returned from the Open House.

From these trials, each year a list is compiled of the top performers, fool-proof plants that really stand out from the pack. The Georgia Gold Medal Winners list has become an award much sought after by breeders. The list is an invaluable tool for floriculturists who want to install quality plants that will hold up through the long, hot summers in the Southeast.

Sharon plans to incorporate a few of the plants that really grabbed her attention during last year's visit into this season's palate, such as Zinnia "Profusion Orange" and "Profusion Cherry," many varieties of Coleus and Million Bells, an Australian Petunia, to mention a few. There are also many improved varieties of commonly used annuals, such as Begonias, Impatiens and Petunias that she will be planting this year.

Thanks to the University of Georgia for providing such a beautiful and functional research facility that offers so many benefits to the horticulture community.

Cynthia, This Bud's For You



—Rick Upchurch

While reading this newsletter, one thing you have probably determined by now is that they don't let me write many articles! Today, I felt compelled to write this one. It has been said "behind every successful man is a woman". No truer words have ever been spoken. There is NO doubt in my mind that Nature Scapes would not have enjoyed the success it has over the last 15 years had it not been for the support I have had from my wife of twenty years.

From the early years of meeting me on the job with our newborn, bringing me lunch just to have a little "quality time," and never seeing me when it took 60 to 70 hours a week to keep things afloat. I have rolled the dice and took a few chances over the last 15 years and none were ever questioned, But like the root system that supports the mighty oak, she has always been there for me.

Cynthia, for all you do this bud's for you. HAPPY 20th

2/10/79-2/10/99

Doing Our Part in Defensive Driving

—Cynthia Upchurch

In an effort to curb rising insurance costs and to compete with the ever-growing traffic in metro Atlanta, Nature Scapes made it mandatory for all eligible drivers to participate and pass a 6 hour Defensive Driving Course. This course was completed on Friday, January 15 and sponsored by the National Safety Council and the Georgia Department of Transportation.

“As our fleet continues to grow, I feel that it is necessary at this time to be proactive in having Nature Scapes do its part in keeping the roads as safe as possible,” quotes Rick.

The following drivers have completed the above mentioned safety course:

Rodney Anderson
Rick Barnes
Adan Benitez
Jose Chacon
Juan Chacon
Allen Clemons
Nelson Fuentes
Marty Gignilliat
David Johnson
Carlos Lazo
Sharon McMillian
Hugo Monterola
Mauricio Monterola
Orlando Quijada
Arnulfo Rivera
Scott Robertson
Miguel Tejada
Juan C. Tejada
Juan F. Tejada
Manuel Tejada
Rick Upchurch
Juan C. Jejada, Jr.
Jim Wages



Employees Win Awards for Best Effort

—Cynthia Upchurch

Once a year, Nature Scapes presents the “Bronze Trowel” and the “Bronze Pruner” Awards. Our managers get together to select which foreman has shown the best craftsmanship in his area of expertise.

A breakfast is held in their honor and the plaques are presented to each award winner. This isn't about money, instead it is about giving your best on the job everyday

Our winner for the Bronze Pruner is MAURICIO MONTEROLA. This award recognizes Mauricio in the landscape maintenance division. The winner for the Bronze Trowel is ADAN BENITEZ, recognizing excellence in the landscape installation division. Winning these awards show the effort and quality they put forth in their jobs. CONGRATULATIONS AND THANKS FOR YOUR HARD WORK!

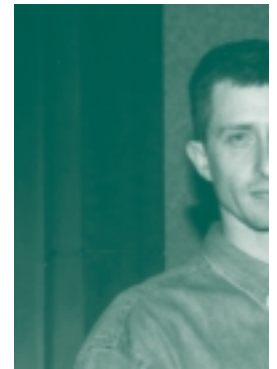
Another Grand Prize Award!

—Cynthia Upchurch

Nature Scapes hasn't wasted any time in 1999 in winning an award. Starting the new year off well, we brought home the Grand Prize Award in the 1999 Awards Program from the GGIA (Georgia Green Industry Association).

This award was presented to us under the category of maintenance services for a multi-family property, Lenox Park, in Fairway Gardens. Nature Scapes has worked with Hart Homes since May of 1995 installing initial phases of landscaping for each home as it was completed. The park areas have been under the care of Nature Scapes maintenance crews since the beginning, and as each new home was landscaped, maintenance services began under the direction of Hart Homes. Now working for the Fairway Gardens Homeowners Association, Nature Scapes continues to provide complete landscape maintenance services including turf management, tree and shrub spraying, irrigation monitoring, fountain maintenance, and floricultural services

We are proud of our association with Fairway Gardens. Our work there allows us to employ creative horticulture techniques for garden-savvy clientele who are receptive to them.





Refining the Underground!

—Rick Barnes

Ah, Spring! That beautiful time of the year when we wait in eager anticipation for those swollen flower buds to burst into bloom! But as this is going on *above* the ground, have you ever wondered what is happening *below* it? When the flower show is spectacular, we seldom think about life below the soil line. On the other hand, when things languish in the garden, it is then that our interest goes deeper.

The time for thinking about the soil is *not* then, not even necessarily on planting day. The time for thinking about the grow- worthiness of your soil is the day you define a particular area in your garden as a turf area, shrubbery bed, or flower planting. In this article, we hope to set you on the right road to the underground!

The procedure we should focus on involves *amending* the soil, since our goal is to provide a suitable medium for growing beautiful plants. There are many SOIL CONDITIONERS or other SOIL AMENDMENTS that will help your garden bloom. When taking on difficult soil, consider the pH, the make-up, and the physical shape of your garden bed.

The first step in the soil-amendment process is to determine the pH of the existing soil. The acidity or alkalinity of the soil has a great deal to do with how well a plant can utilize the nutrients found in the proximity of its roots. The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service will test the soil in your yard for \$4.00. The test results will tell you what the existing pH is and how to bring it into an optimal range for growing plants.

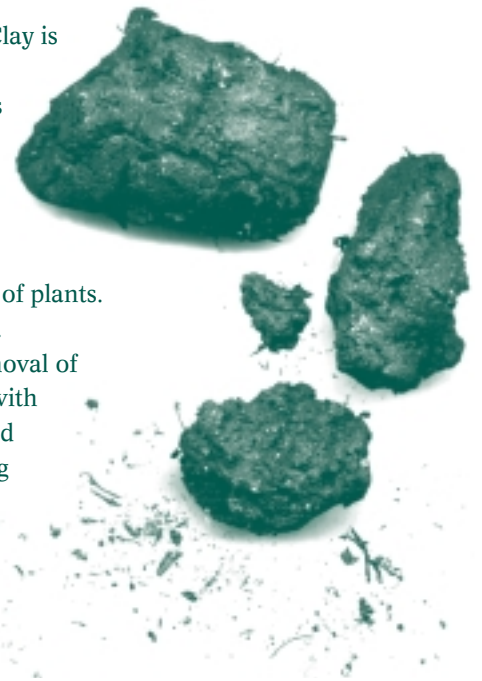
Knowing the pH of your soil will give you a baseline from which to measure how the soil conditioners or other soil amendments you add to your garden will affect the pH. Soil conditioners come in a wide range of types, mixes, and contents. Topsoil alone makes a good conditioner. Be sure to get one with a high organic matter content (nice dark color) and one that has been sifted or screened. A word of caution, however. An abundance of organic matter can sometimes *lower* the pH. If you have a soil with a low pH (say, below 6.0) you may need to add some lime.

With the pH of the soil now under control, we can tackle the second problem of the underground, the STRUCTURE of the soil. The bane of gardening in north Georgia is a 4-letter word that we hear over and over again on gardening shows, and read ad-nauseum in gardening publications - CLAY! Clay is one of the 3 basic ingredients of all soils. The other 2 are sand and silt, and the only basic difference between them is their relative size. A good soil for growing plants has a balance of all 3 particle sizes, so that air, water, earthworms, fertilizers, and all the countless organisms that comprise a soil can move freely throughout this dynamic system.

Unfortunately, we are a little heavy on the clay side of the soil spectrum in these parts. Clay is not all bad - it helps the soil retain moisture and is great for the transmission of fertilizer elements. On the down side, clay, due to the small size of the individual soil particles, promotes soil compaction, inhibits soil aeration, and - probably the worst of its attributes- prevents water from draining away from the root zone of the plants. When a soil contains too much water, roots drown! This is the root (pardon the pun) of the proverbial drainage problem, a topic of frequent conversation around Nature Scapes.

Drainage problems should always be corrected in the landscape prior to the installation of plants. Surface water should be able to drain away without puddling for an extended period of time. If conditions do indicate that water accumulates, the problem can be corrected by either removal of the clay and replacement with a more porous soil (expensive) or amending the existing soil with substances having larger particle sizes, such as coarse river sand, granite sand, or fine crushed granite. Installation of a sub-surface drainage system may also correct this problem, assuming that gravity can assist in the removal of water from the point at which it accumulates. Still another solution in certain instances is the installation of certain plants, such as varieties of Liriope which can tolerate the poor drainage and actually pull water out of the ground.

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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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So we have a soil test, we have selected a soil conditioner, and now we are ready to improve that soil so we can create that perfect flower bed. Sweat-equity in this process comes in the *mixing* of these ingredients. We have heard of many people that physically *remove* some of the clay soil from their bed areas and *replace* it with these soil conditioners. This is fine, but not necessary, as the final product you are looking for is a mixture of the old soil and the new products. Possibly a better plan would be to break up the existing clay (a shovel works well, a roto-tiller is better), add your amendments in several measured increments, and thoroughly mix the conditioners with the clay to create a new growing medium out of the old soil. Remember, there are properties of the clay that are desirable for plant growth. Incorporating all of these products in with the existing soil will result in a raised planting mound, or "berm," that will also assist in the downward drainage of excess water from the root zone.

Well, you've done it - solved one of the worst problems we face growing plants in Georgia. Is this a permanent solution? Depending on the soil conditioners you use, your berm may give you years of beautiful plantings. Depending upon how much conditioner you used, you may find that, as the seasons progress, the soil becomes re compacted and the process needs to be repeated. Just another battle on the land with Mother Nature. Until then, amend that soil, and watch those plants leap out of the ground - just like you dreamed they would!



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