

Water, Water Everywhere...?

—Rick Barnes

The headlines are ominous: “Scientists predict massive droughts,” “Major drought hits several eastern states.” We live in a area of lush, green forests and a seemingly endless supply of water. As of this writing, rainfall in Atlanta is over 6.5 inches below normal since January 1, during what is traditionally one of the wettest periods of the year. Is there real cause for concern? Is there anything we can do about it?

Let’s imagine that all of the water on Earth would fit in a one gallon container. Available fresh water would comprise just ONE TABLESPOON of this gallon, about 0.26 percent! Approximately 97% of the water on the planet is salt water, and another 2% is locked up in ice caps and glaciers. From this one tablespoon of water that is left, all of life in our world must drink, bathe, water crops (or landscapes!), fill swimming pools, and make food, paper, clothing, and other products. One can thus begin to see the scope of the problem.

Recent studies of tree growth rings from some very old post oak trees in Arkansas and ponderosa pines in California showed that 2 “megadroughts” took place in western north America during the 1300’s and 1500’s. These were prolonged droughts, each lasting more than 25 years. They were natural occurrences, uninfluenced by the hand of man. It is debated as to whether or not man *has* influenced such phenomena as global warming or El Nino and La Nina, the later 2 of which wreak havoc on the Earth’s natural water distribution system.

Mankind has come to realize that we cannot live without water or without being good stewards of our limited water resources. Here are some of the things being done:

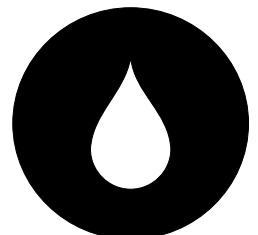
— In the world arena, a new initiative called the Global Water Partnership has succeeded in bringing countries such as India and Vietnam together to begin talking about integrated water management practices.

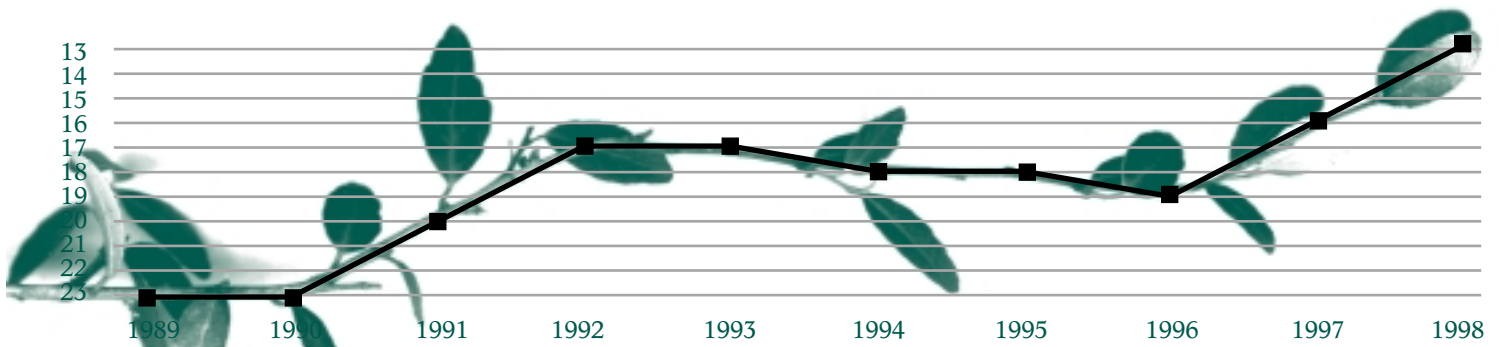
— On the regional level, the Tri-State compact was recently adopted by Georgia, Florida, and Alabama to govern the future water management of the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint river system. This pro-active effort, and many others like it, are helping to insure that cities like Atlanta and states such as Alabama have the water they need, while making certain that one of the most productive fisheries in the eastern US — at the mouth of the Apalachicola River — is sustained for future generations.

— In Georgia, the WaterStewards is a group of industry professionals who watch water developments from the governmental front to make sure that future regulations will be sustainable to both conservation and agri business interests. The Georgia Water Wise Council is a volunteer organization with the goal of teaching water conservation to industry and the general public through the utilization of “Xeriscaping” in the landscape (see Cultivated News, Summer 1998 for more information). Xeriscaping is the first step we can all take to be certain we get the most mileage out of that tablespoon of water!

Sources Cited for this article:

National Geographic Magazine, November, 1993
 The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Wednesday, December 16, 1998
 Marist Matters, Spring ‘99: “Water is Life,” by Laura Edwards.
 Georgia Green Industry Association Journal, December, 1997.





Remaining Strong When the “Big Guys” Move In

Here is how we have climbed the ranks in the Atlanta Commercial Landscape market.

—*Pamela Lasota*

Each year when the Atlanta Business Chronicle’s Book of Lists hits the stands, we anxiously turn to the Commercial Landscape Companies list to see where we place. It is always interesting to see how we compare to other companies. Over the last nine years, we have risen, fallen and stayed the same.

The mergers and acquisitions in the Atlanta landscape market have created large companies, with 500 or more employees, increasing the gap from one rank to the next. We are proud to have remained a privately-owned, hands on

company, where one phone call can put you right to the top. Rick Upchurch takes pride in maintaining a “low turnover” company both with clients and employees. As he says, “If you treat people well, the loyalty and dedication will be there.” Rick remains loyal to his clientele, to him the loss of a client is a personal loss, and he always calls to find out the “why?” and “what could we have done to prevent it”? This attitude flowing from the top, trickling its way down to everyone in the company, is what we hope will set us apart from the conglomerates in the Atlanta landscape market.

Heritage Oaks

— *Allen Clemmons, Maintenance Supervisor*

Heritage Oaks is a mature, multi-family residential development nestled in a mountain cove forest, just above the flood plain of the Chattahoochee River. The site has many natural beauties, such as American Beech trees, masses of Mountain Laurels, ferns and even a waterfall. Annual color enhances the beauty of the community, and is used throughout the property, from the entrance to the cul-de-sacs. The subdued color schemes of the buildings blend them with their natural surroundings, adding so much to what is already a beautiful community.

The Homeowner’s Association has made an enormous commitment to invest in long-term landscape refurbishment. Nature Scapes has recently completed a refurbishment, replacing several large, Bermuda areas that were declining due to lack of sun, with Fescue, a more shade tolerant turf grass. This refurbishment included the addition of many trees and flowering shrubs and several new annual beds. As a part of the Homeowner’s Association’s long-term plan, they have decided to install irrigation in phases, so that eventually the entire property will be irrigated.

They have also made an investment in their mature landscape by bringing an Arborist to structure prune the large trees; this pruning method not only enhances the beauty of the trees, but also adds to their longevity.

Maintenance Challenges - The landscape maintenance crews face several challenges at Heritage Oaks. One of the biggest challenges is manicuring turf on steep inclines. The property is also hand pruned, to maintain a natural, neat appearance. This allows the technician to sculpture the plants to follow the contours of the many slopes, which is an especially detail-oriented task. The crews seem to be very motivated by these challenges and the finished look gives them a great sense of accomplishment.

We chose this development as our first feature property because its natural setting gives it a distinct look. The commitment of the Homeowners to invest in their community’s future horticulturally, ensures that Heritage Oaks will retain its natural beauty and value.



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“Shade Tree” Gardening —Rick Barnes

Nearly 10 years ago, my family and I traded a sunny, meadow-like landscape on the edge of an old Pecan grove for the primordial shade of a Georgia climax forest consisting of various Oaks, American Beech, Hickories, and Tulip Poplars. We enjoy this awesome fragment of what our state looked like when the first European immigrants arrived here. As a gardener, however, this shade presents challenges little understood by anyone who has a sunny patch to plant. For the past decade I have shoveled this shady, rocky ground, trying anything and everything that might add a little color and interest to the forest floor. Many successes and even more failures have marked this journey. The purpose of this article is to share some of these experiences with you, for I know that there are many people in Atlanta that must, to some degree, deal with shade gardening. So here are some methods and myths, as well as a short list of plants that I have found to be very adaptable to shady situations.

“All shade is the same!” MYTH ! The best example of this is comparing Pine shade to that of hardwood trees. A forest composed solely of Pine trees allows far more light to penetrate to the ground level than a forest of hardwood trees. If you have ever been to Callaway Gardens, you know that their fantastic collection of Azaleas from all over the world is situated in a Pine forest! Turf grasses such as Fescue do much better in the light shade of a Pine grove than they do in the full, burning Atlanta sun. On the other hand, many plants prefer the soil of deeper shade to the acid soils found under the pines. Therefore, Step 1 in shade gardening is determining what kind of shade you have!

“You can’t prepare the soil under shade trees for plants without killing them!” MYTH! Granted, thorough cultivation of the soil around the area of tree roots will cause damage and even death to trees, but light cultivation of existing soil, even in the individual planting holes, is a sustainable practice. I have even brought in new soil and soil conditioners to create low, raised planting areas under the trees with no adverse effects. One should remember, however, that the key to cultivation in the shade is moderation- enough improvement to aid in the establishment of the new plants, but not so much that the tree’s critical feeder roots are damaged.

“There are so few flowering plants that grow in the shade!” MYTH! I now introduce a new term to you- Spring Ephemerals. These are plants that bloom in the Spring between the time the temperatures warm up and when the trees have completely leafed out. There is tremendous diversity among this group of plants, notable native examples being Wild Columbine, Bleeding Heart, Trillium, Trout Lily, Wild Ginger, Spotted Wintergreen, Wood Poppy, Crested Iris, Foam Flower, Alum Root, Shooting Star, Virginia Bluebells, and many, many more. An entire year of floral diversity can unfold in a few short weeks by utilizing the spring ephemerals in your shade garden!

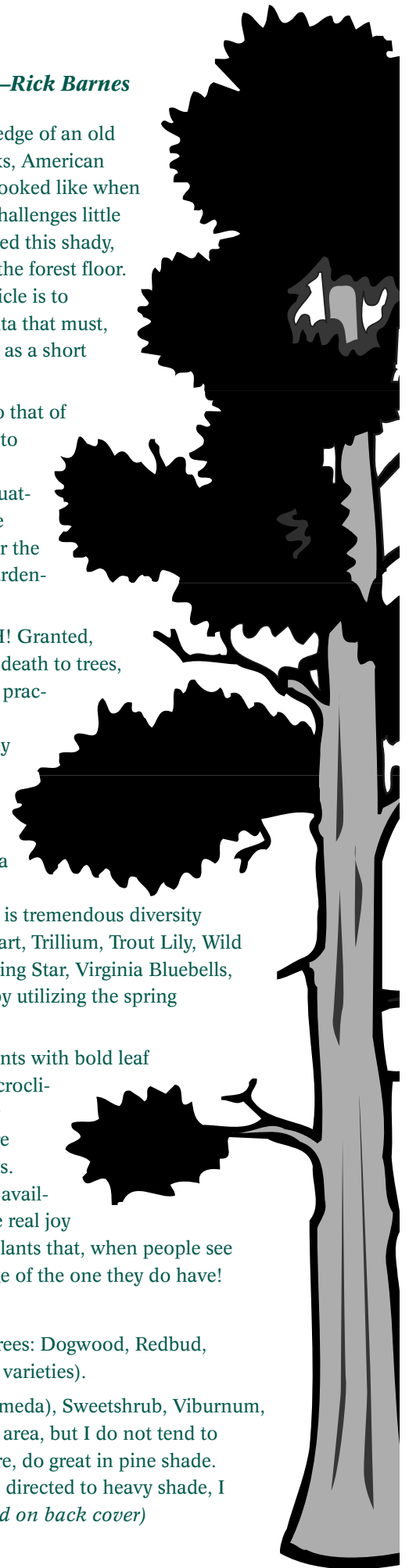
“What you can’t do with flowers, do with textures and variegation!” EXACTLY!!! Plants with bold leaf textures, fine leaf textures, or variegated leaves can transform a dull, shady area into a microclimate of unlimited interest. For bold textures, use Mahonia, Aucuba, Fatsia, Aspidistra, or large-leaved Hostas such as ‘Sieboldiana’, ‘Honeybells’, or ‘Sum and Substance.’ For more intermediate textures, utilize Florida Anise, Agarista, or some of the smaller-leaved Hostas. Fine textures round out the shade garden with such plants as Nandina and the dozens of available varieties of ferns that are synonymous with the mind’s conception of cool shade. The real joy of the shade garden comes in finding the combinations of colors, textures, and mixes of plants that, when people see them, wish they had a little shady spot in their garden, or motivate them to take advantage of the one they do have!

Here’s the “Short List” of great plants I have used in the shade:

Trees: Yes, the following make a great addition to the shade garden as “understory” trees: Dogwood, Redbud, Sassafras, Magnolia, Sourwood, and Japanese Maples (especially the green, wide-leaved varieties).

Shrubs: Mahonia, Aucuba, Nandina, Agarista, Florida Anise, Pieris (Japanese Andromeda), Sweetshrub, Viburnum, and Hydrangeas, especially the Oak-Leaf. Certain Rhododendrons do well in the Atlanta area, but I do not tend to pamper plants and they therefore have not done well for me. Azaleas, as mentioned before, do great in pine shade. However, I have seen many an Azalea languish in deep hardwood shade. Since this list is directed to heavy shade, I exclude them also.

(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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“Shade Tree” Gardening

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Perennials: I named many before, and this list of my favorites includes some of them and introduces some others: Lenten Rose (Helleborus- The Best!), Hosta, Autumn Fern (the toughest, best fern), Wood Poppy, Virginia Bluebells, Wild Columbine, Bleeding Heart, Shooting Star, Japanese Roof Iris, Crested Iris, Yellow Flag Iris (this has to be one of the most adaptable plants in the universe!), and Violets (many consider this a weed, but flower and texture are unbeatable in the shade!)

Annuals: Impatiens are the mainstay of the shade garden for Summer annuals, but Torrenia and Begonias will also work. Don't forget the foliage annuals for shade- Coleus and Caladium!

New and Improved

We are announcing some improvements to Cultivated News. You may have noticed our “Featured Property.” Each newsletter, we will highlight a different property that is horticulturally outstanding, where homeowners take particular pride in their surroundings. For our next issue, we will be changing the format from quarterly to semi-annual, and will remain seasonal with Spring/Summer and Fall/Winter issues. We hope this will allow us to produce a more comprehensive newsletter while incorporating a full-color format. We are very excited about these changes and look forward to our first semi-annual release this fall.



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