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Nature's Landscape News & Notes

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April 2010

The calendar has turned over to Spring once again, and for the team here at Ray Smith, this is the time of year dedicated to planning, planning, and more planning. While we are looking forward to another season of installing & caring for your extraordinary and unique landscapes, it is also fitting to look back at the past year and reflect on some of the good things we do environmentally as part of our daily operations. Every member of our team takes pride in the many ways that we reduce, recycle, and re-use as much as we can.

We are composting leaves and debris from our clients, as well as from other landscape companies. After a year or so of decomposition, the material is ready to be used to amend landscape beds prior to planting. It is also an organically-rich top dressing for annual planting areas that thrive on the readily-available nutrients. Our office has committed to being greener with the use of e-mail correspondence, rather than using the paper memos and notes that used to circulate everywhere.

We have even begun to use biodegradable landscape flagging tape to mark trees and shrubs. These are all small things in the overall scope, but if everyone does just a few little things we can collectively have a tremendous impact on our environment. After all, when it comes to protecting the Earth, we are all in the "green industry". Have a happy Spring, and many thanks for your continued support!

Those Stubborn Lawn Weeds are Back



Warmer spring weather signals broadleaf weed seeds that it's time to start growing. When you consider that just one dandelion seed head has more than 200 fluffy seeds, especially designed to be carried long distances by the wind, chances are that you have a lot of weed seeds getting ready to grow in your lawn.

They're Tough, But They Can Be Stopped

Most broadleaf weeds are extremely hardy. For example, the dandelion can have roots up to 5' long, making it very tough to completely remove. But these persistent weeds can be prevented from overtaking and ruining your lawn. Broadleaf weeds must be treated as they're growing, so post emergent controls should be applied to your lawn as soon as the weeds become visible. Once applied, post-emergent controls are absorbed through the leaves of the weeds. They then work their way down to the roots. Within a few days, the leaves start to curl, and the weeds aren't nearly as visible. It can take several weeks for broadleaf weeds to disappear completely, and new weeds can (and probably will) pop up after the initial post-emergent application. If so, subsequent treatments will keep them under control.

Doing Your Part

The best way to control broadleaf weeds is to grow a dense stand of grass that can outcompete weed invaders, so it's important to have your lawn fertilized correctly. You can help too by ensuring that your lawn gets enough water and mowing properly.

Your lawn has just survived another long winter. In order to get it to a lush, green glory, it will need to be raked, repaired, fertilized, aerated, and maybe even completely renovated. We offer complete lawn care services, now including mowing & irrigation systems and water management. We offer customized fertilization programs and insect, weed and disease control. When you work with us we can take care of the most critical factors that contribute to having a great lawn. By utilizing our complete lawn services we will be able to be on your property often and monitor and adjust care accordingly and cohesively. This is the time to get started as it is critical to apply a crabgrass preventative, take care of early weeds, soil test and turn-on and adjust sprinkler systems. If some spot seeding (to full renovation) is needed, Spring is the time. Does your lawn look the way you desire? As with our other departments we offer a free evaluation of lawns so why not take advantage of our expertise.

Come See Our New Water Feature



Curious to see a water feature close-up or just want to see another type than what you already have on your property? We are pleased to announce that we have just completed a water feature at the Agway Country Gardens located on Snake Hollow Road (just off Montauk Highway) in Bridgehampton. It is designed by Ed Drohan our water garden expert and was built by our own crews. The feature is shown in the picture to the left; see our [Water Gardens Portfolio](#) for more pictures. It offers just a sneak peak of what you could enjoy on your property. There is a feature for every property, big or small. Take a

look and let Ed and us know what you think. You can reach Ed at edrohan@raysmithassociates.com or 631-287-6100 Ext. 107

Garden Tips

MONTHLY CHECKLIST What You Can Do:

-Attend Arbor Day celebrations or plant a tree! Arbor Day is the last Friday of this month.

-Plan and prepare for your Spring garden. It's a good idea to turn the soil in flower beds at least once before planting. This aerates the soil and makes planting easier.

-Consider mulching to retain moisture and inhibit weed growth.

-Consider a small water feature for your deck or patio this year. There are hundreds to choose from, and the sound of gurgling water will have a relaxing and cooling effect throughout the upcoming summer.

What Our Professionals Should Do:

-Disease and insect activity is building up steam on trees and shrubs right about now. Plan for early plant health care program to help manage damaging insects and diseases.

-Plant and transplant now.

-Begin Lawn Care program including mowing and irrigation.

-Start pruning your Roses.

-Evaluate your trees for aesthetics and desired sunlight penetration. Have them pruned early in the season for maximum enjoyment of your property.

Plant Health Care (PHC)



Plant Health Care (PHC) is a relatively new concept in professional landscape management. In years past, treatments were either applied prophylactic on all plants or only applied after plants had been damaged. Preventative care involving frequent monitoring allowing for early detection, informed decision-making, and targeted treatments that provide long-term solutions are vital parts of PHC programs. Adopting a PHC program can prevent problems or keep them from getting serious. Healthy plants naturally enhance their environment, strengthening natural defense systems and suppressing pests.

If unhealthy environmental factors are present, we will provide you with information about the problem and all possible treatment options - just like a doctor would a patient. With our monitoring visits a scouting report is left at the property to alert to any existing or anticipated problems. Utilizing natural processes are our first choice, however they are neither practical nor effective in all situations, and some type of chemical treatment (whether organic or 'conventional') may be needed. We work to manage pests in environmentally responsible ways, taking care to treat for only those that are harmful and preserve beneficials.

Proactive PHC programs cost considerably less than reactive interventions. PHC programs maintain the vigor of the landscape, helping ensure the health of landscapes, lowering maintenance costs and increasing property values. Landscapes should be inspected every 2 to 4 weeks during the growing season.

Our Certified Arborists & landscape professionals are well-trained, educated, and experienced professionals who are familiar with landscape plants, their needs, and the pests and diseases most likely to attack. Our applicators are highly-trained and are licensed by New York State. Our approach is multi-faceted, holistic and customer-driven, focusing on the health, growth, and beauty of your landscape. With the harsh past Winter and the heavy rains this is going to be a year for fungal diseases to thrive. If you don't have a PHC program in place for your property, now, before the growing season goes into full swing, is the time to call us for a no cost comprehensive property review.

Got Spring Bloom Envy?



As you looked around your neighborhood last year, you may have seen some trees and shrubs that you'd like to have in your own landscape. If a plant that you like is flourishing nearby, this is a good indicator that it will do well on your property too. But before making any final decisions, you should be sure you have answers to the following questions:

- Will the tree eventually outgrow its intended site?
- What type of fruit or pods will it produce (if any)?
- How much pruning will be needed to keep it in shape?
- What will it look like in the fall?

-How susceptible will it be to insect or disease problems?

You should be sure that the tree you have in mind is a good choice for your property before going ahead with the installation.

If you have questions on any landscape plantings; we are pleased to welcome aboard our new landscape designer, Jason Argentieri. Jason is a native of Long Island and has over 20 years of experience in landscape design. Jason is a graduate of SUNY Farmingdale with a degree in landscape design. Jason has received six Long Island Nursery & Landscape Association (LINLA) landscape awards for outstanding projects. He is available to help with everything from a full design & installation to a just a few transplants.

Opening Your Water Features



Spring is finally here and that means your water features are starting to wake up from a long winters' slumber. With that said, it's time to get them opened up and ready for a beautiful summer season! Cleaning out your feature is a very important part of getting started. Depending on the feature you possess, draining or doing a half water change is where we start. The rocks and gravel may have unwanted debris or sediments that we want out, so we pump out the water, as well as cleaning off the rocks and gravel as we go. The water quality needs to be brought up to our high standards to promote good fish health and the thriving of your water plants. Fertilizing your plants and adding the proper amount of essential bacteria and enzymes, through our organic approach, will assure you a beautiful and healthy ecosystem!

Plant of the Month-Crabapple



Few ornamental trees offer the variety of tree shapes, sizes, & flower colors as flowering crabapples. They are of interest in all four seasons; Spring sees the colors of emerging leaves and buds. Unopened flower buds may hint of one color and as flowers open, other hues are revealed in a spectacular floral display. As flowers fade the rich foliage offers another subtle contribution to the landscape. As autumn arrives crabapple foliage transform to vibrant colors. The snow of winter accents fruit (on fruiting varieties), branches, and tree shape.

Flowering crabapples vary greatly in size. At maturity, certain cultivars will only attain a height of eight feet, while others will tower to heights greater than 40 feet. However, most flowering crabapples reach mature



heights of 15 to 25 feet. Crabapples have diverse growth habits or tree shapes. The shapes consist of weeping rounded, spreading, upright, vase-shaped, and pyramidal. Depending on the cultivar and spring temperatures, full bloom could occur as early as mid-April or delay until mid-May. Blossom colors range from pearly white through delicate pinks to a deep red. There are even cultivars with coral or salmon colored flowers.

Crabapples have developed a poor reputation as a result of disease problems however; extensive breeding and evaluation projects have resulted in numerous selections that are resistant to these problems. Crab apples are actually relatively easy to grow as long as they have a site in full sun, and the soil is well-drained.

Crabapples do require some pruning to retain their best health and appearance. Rapidly growing shoots from branches and the base of tree, dead, diseased, damaged, and crossing branches should be removed. Pruning is also necessary to open up the center of the plant to sunlight and air movement. Due to their versatility, crabapples make excellent choices for use around the landscape. If thinking of adding a new flowering tree to your landscape don't forget to consider this tree. Spring is the best time to plant Crabapples, and if you would like more information just give us a call.

Ask the Expert-Is there such a thing as good fungus in soil?



Believe it or not, fungus can be good for your plants! Millions of years ago, plants established a symbiotic relationship with soil organisms called mycorrhizal fungi. The fungi serve as a secondary root system, extending them far out into the soil to extract water and mineral elements for their host plants. In return, the plant supplies the fungi sugars on which to live.

Plants with thriving mycorrhizal root systems are better able to survive and grow in stressful environments because the mycorrhizae are able to absorb, accumulate and transfer water and mineral elements to plants more effectively than roots without mycorrhizae. The picture to the upper left shows a root system with mycorrhizae.

In forest soils, mycorrhizal fungi are abundant. However, most of today's landscape environments have been created as part of construction projects that disturb or remove the topsoil where plant roots and these beneficial fungi live. As a result, the ground has no natural topsoil and is virtually devoid of mycorrhizal fungi, making it much harder for these plants to thrive.



Methods have been developed to grow mycorrhizal fungi spores in commercial quantities, and formulate them into products for landscape planting and maintenance projects. Now mycorrhizal fungi can be restored to lifeless soils so that beautiful landscapes can be established naturally. The picture to the lower left shows a root system without mycorrhizae.

While inoculations of mycorrhizal fungi will not benefit all plants in all situations it does provide another tool in caring for your landscape plants. This has been an especially stressful Winter on plants, in many cases resulting in damaged root systems from plants uprooting and needing to be replanted and supported, and in others roots literally drowning under water. If you have trees or shrubs looking less than healthy this treatment may be of help. Please contact us if you have additional questions on this fascinating and critical relationship between plants and fungus.

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*Providing beautiful, healthy, and balanced
landscapes for over 30 Years*



Did you know that...The energy savings generated from recycling one glass bottle can power your computer for 25 minutes & recycling just one aluminum can conserves enough energy to power a TV for up to three hours.

HAVE YOU SCHEDULED AN APPOINTMENT TO HAVE US TURN ON YOUR SPRINKLER SYSTEM YET?

Fact of the Month:
The average person throws out 1500 pounds of garbage a year.