

“Ask The Plant Groom”™ by Dale Groom, The Plant Groom™

For: QA1033

“When the going gets tough, the tough get going” and similar phrases have been introduced to us at various times from multiple sources.

These sayings are currently very true in the “world of green” throughout our great gardening state. Crispy leaves of plants are viewed from Texarkana to El Paso, Amarillo to Beaumont and all points in between. However, plants are also blooming profusely in all areas of Texas.

NOW is prime time to “get going” and check out the tough plants currently providing color, holding soil in place, providing shade and other cooling effects and enhancing our lives. Plants and landscaping provide this and more including increasing real dollar values of personal properties and improving our environment.

The following are some of my ideas, thoughts, suggestions and recommendations regarding lawns, gardens and landscapes in Texas.

- While information received from national sources is often entertaining, enjoyable and accurate be sure to qualify for Texas conditions regarding plant recommendations, their uses and culture. Texas is special.

An accurate, reliable source of “all things” horticultural in Texas is the aggie horticultural web site. Access the site through Google and enter aggie hort then click on the aggie horticulture site and ... cruise. This is the world’s #1 visited horticultural web site.

Accurate, reliable and timely lawn/turfgrass information for Texas is found at the aggie turf site.

- Potable water is our most valuable natural resource according to authorities and Texans. It’s the fluid of life. We must have it to survive.

This time of year one only needs to look at the water bill to know it take a \$ or \$\$ to maintain most landscapes and gardens in acceptable green conditions. Let me strongly recommend that all new plantings and retro plant installations be Water Wise.

Water Wise plantings, landscapes and gardens subscribe to the following principals.

1. Create a plan. It does not need to be a complicated plan. However, it should include native and well-adapted plants known to survive our Texas climate with minimum water usage after establishment.
2. Perform through soil preparation prior to installing the first plant. Time, energy, effort and dollars spent in soil preparation are wise investments.

3. Install plants properly and at the best time of year to obtain relatively quick establishment. In Texas, the fall is an excellent time to install woody winter hardy plant material in the landscape and gardens. It's my favorite time to plant them.
4. After planting is complete – mulch, mulch, mulch with a minimum of 3 – 4" of your favorite mark mulch. And, maintain this layer year round for the life of your plantings. While some folks may promote or favor one mulch more than others, no mulch is good if it's not used. So, mulch, mulch and mulch all your plantings.
5. Properly maintain your plantings. If you selected minimum care well adapted and low water use plants effort here is greatly reduced. When water is applied do so during early morning and thoroughly. Only irrigate when needed. DO NOT water on a preset schedule or lightly.

Following the above five basic principles will greatly reduce the usage of potable water throughout in our Texas landscapes and gardens while maintaining great looks.

- The selection and placement of quality long-lived shade trees can reduce our utility bills. During this time of year everyone is looking for ... a shady place.

Try this. On a full sun August afternoon stand in the sun for two minutes and then step into the shade. Any difference? You bet 'ya! This effect also applies to our homes; neighborhoods, communities and cities so plant more shade trees.

Remember, plant quality long lived well adapted and relatively pest and trouble free selections. DO NOT install short lived, fast growing, weak wooded, problem prone and high water usage trees.

- Visit public parks and plantings, botanical gardens, arboreta and any other location open to visitors and note the specific plants utilized and "doing well" in our current stressful conditions.

One demonstration planting I suggest for your list is at the State Fair of Texas. If you visit the Fair this fall stroll by the Exhibition Building and review the Earth Kind Rose demonstration/exhibit planting.

You will find 'Belinda's Dream' and 'Knock Out' two Water Wise and Earth Kind Roses on display plus approximately (12) more varieties being tested. This demonstration planting is a joint effort of Texas Cooperative Extension-Dallas County and the State Fair of Texas.

Rose varieties currently designated as Earth Kind Roses will grow anywhere in Texas with minimal to no care once established. Visit Earth Kind Roses on the web.

Dale Groom, Extension Horticulturist -Dallas County, Author, Columnist, Radio/TV Host is also known state wide as The Plant Groom™. Send your lawn, garden and landscape questions to Dale at dalegroom@mycvc.net.

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