

Ask The Plant Groom(tm) by Dale Groom, The Plant Groom(tm)

QA1103

Hi Dale!

I recently purchased a small office building in Irving with "Gardens" as part of its' name. The problem I am having right now is the "garden" part of it does not exist. There are a couple of areas that would make a wonderful home to certain plants, bushes, ground cover, cactus etc. My reason for e-mailing you is I was wondering if you could give me some ideas of what type of plants I should use, that would survive the drastic temperature changes that Dallas experiences from summer to winter. Any advice that you can pass on to me to get this project started would be greatly appreciated. Thanking you in advance. - K.C.

The issue is not unique to Irving, Temple, Brownwood, Tyler or any other Texas city. It's hot in the summer from Texarkana to El Paso and Amarillo to Beaumont.

What you need to look for and utilize in your landscape are Water Wise and EARTH-KIND(tm) landscape plantings, soil preparations and management. Do install plants that are hardy in USDA Plant Hardiness Zone 7 and winter hardiness should not be an issue.

EARTH-KIND(tm) soil preparation in clay soils involves the tilling in as deeply as a rear tined tiller will till 3" of finished plant derived compost plus 3" of expanded shale one inch of each per pass with a tiller. The planting beds should then be crowned 6 - 9" in the centers and sloped to their outside edges. After planting is completed only drip irrigation should be installed and finally a 3 - 4" layer of shredded tree trimmings applied to cover all bare soil. If shredded tree trimmings are not available utilize shredded bark.

Plants that are both EARTH-KIND(tm) and Water Wise include but are not limited to mildew resist crape myrtles, salvia greggii, lantana, ruellia, crinums, nandina and yaupon holly. The finest and most colorful WaterWise and EK pants are EARTH-KIND(tm) Roses. These beauties only need; good air movement around them, good soil drainage, full sun and minimum irrigation to bloom and grow their very best. No fertilizers of any kind and no sprays of any type are utilized and pruning or deadheading is not needed. EARTH-KIND(tm) Roses are planted throughout Texas with outstanding results.

More information on EARTH-KIND(tm) Roses is available at <http://earthkindroses.tamu.edu/>

More information on the EARTH-KIND(tm) program is available at <http://earthkind.tamu.edu/>

Information from the Texas WaterWise Council, Inc is available at <http://www.waterwisetexas.org/>

Additional horticultural information is available at <http://dallas-tx.tamu.edu/hort/hort.htm> (be sure to review the quality links at this Dallas site) and <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/tamuhort.html>

Now is a good time to become familiar with what's available, decide what your tastes and desires are for your plantings and move forward to implement them. If you do not get this activity completed during the spring, fall is a great time of the year to install landscape plantings.

If you wish, you may call my office any M - F, 8:30am - 4:00pm to speak directly with a Master Gardener for free assistance with horticultural issues at 214-904-3053. Good luck on your project and I wish you all the best in 2007.

My house sits in the middle of post oak and red cedar trees. I am attempting to landscape but poison ivy and particularly green briars seem to maintain a strangle hold on my place. I use "RoundUp for poison ivy" to try to keep them under control in my flower beds, but the briars just keep coming back up. Spraying them is a daily ordeal. As I have a couple of large areas that I plan to convert to something other than briar patches, what would you recommend I do to prepare these areas so as to avoid the problems I currently have in my existing flower beds? Please accept my thanks for any advice you may have.- C. B.

Whatever you do regarding landscaping do nothing around your existing post oaks. These are one of the if not THE most sensitive oaks to disturbing the soil wherever their root systems spread. While I've been in the "green industry" since 1971 I'm still a student and like to learn new ways/methods of accomplishing goals successfully. Through the years I have unfortunately seen a large number of magnificent post oak trees lost due to various landscape plantings.

I will not recommend installing landscape plantings around post oaks. And while it is totally non scientific, I'm not sure but what they may terminate if we look at them wrong. Well, maybe not that sensitive but my recommendation is do not plant around these trees.

The green briar you speak of is most likely smilax. Just below the ground where they emerge is a woody part of this plant where new sprouting and growth emerges. Utilize a heavy grubbing hoe or mattox to remove these and eliminate each vine. If you have several just start with one and proceed with this activity at will.

There are specific aids on the market labeled to control poison ivy and poison oak. You may wish to utilize one of these in your weed pest control activity. If so, do read and follow label directions. Some of these aids will also damage broadleaf desirable plants they come in contact with so make sure they are only applied to targeted weed plants. If you are not allergic to poison ivy physically removing them roots and all is an additional control venue available.

After the desired weed control is accomplished prepare you planting bed(s) utilizing the EARTH-KIND(tm) recommendations. In clay soils till in 3" of plant derived finished compost plus 3" of expanded shale one inch for each per pass as deep as a rear tined tiller will till, crown the bed's centers 6-9" and install your plantings. In sandy soils use 6" of the same compost type and no expanded shale.

Dale Groom, Extension Horticulturist, Master Gardener Program Coordinator-Dallas County, Texas Cooperative Extension, Texas A & M University System, Native Texan, Columnist, Author, Radio/TV Host is also known state wide as The Plant Groom(tm) You may send your horticultural related questions to Dale including lawns, gardens and landscapes at dalegroom@mycvc.net.

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