



## **Compliments of the Apartment Association of Tarrant County – Texas**

### **Landscaping for Dummies**

*Written by Pat Sutherland*

Flowers, trees, shrubs, and lawns are simple but profound features of your real estate portfolio. Get them right, the rewards are numerous, Get them wrong, it will impact your bottom-line.

Whether you are a green-thumb or green with envy, landscape is an aspect of the rental owner business that deserves some attention. According to an August 2003 Business Week article, landscaping increases the resale value of single-family rental property more per dollar than stabilizing the foundation or overhauling the plumbing.

Mark your calendar and be sure to join your fellow independent rental owners at Spring Creek BBQ on Airport Freeway in Bedford on Wednesday, April 14, from 12:00 noon – 1:30 p.m. for a discussion of landscaping options.

Ron Kerwin owner of AATC member firm Captain Ron's Lawn and Landscaping will various techniques and approaches to enhancing your property's exterior. From grass maintenance to tree care, Ron will guide you through the maze of options and opportunities. He will demonstrate different styles of landscaping and suggest potential designs based on specific site conditions and appropriate local plant communities.

As you prepare for the April meeting, consider the following tips from the [Texas Master Gardners Association](#):

#### **Trees:**

To maintain healthy trees you need to know how and when to prune, fertilize, water, and care for wounds.

Pruning is needed to remove dead, diseased, injured, broken, rubbing and crowded limbs. Trees are thinned to allow for the wind and air to flow through. Proper thinning reduces wind resistance often responsible for uprooting or creating deformities. A well-thinned tree reflects a skilled arborist with good judgment and is a worthwhile investment in a valued tree. Healthy, well-formed trees increase the value of property; the opposite is also true.

Trees require certain essential elements to function and grow. Fertilizing a tree can increase growth, reduce susceptibility to certain diseases and pests, and can help reverse declining health. The frequency of watering depends on the type of soil and the amount of rainfall. Water must be allowed to soak deep into the ground. The most beneficial time to water trees is in the early morning. Water slowly or use drip irrigation until the water has moistened down to the roots. Do not allow water to puddle or accumulate and run off. This is wasteful and can be detrimental to root growth and function.

Lawn mowers and string trimmers hitting the bark of a tree can severely damage the inner bark and cambium near the soil line. This damage invites insects and fungi infestation. The best advice is to remove sod from around the base of the tree and replace with mulch.

### **Lawns:**

Seasons, weather, and nutrient availability, are some of the many things that can affect grass growth. The best and most safe rule of thumb is to never remove more than 1/3 of the leaf blade at any one time. Lawns are being mowed too infrequently if there are piles of grass clippings left after each mowing. Consider a farmers hay field. Farmers remove close to 90% of the grass plants leaf surface when cutting hay. The grass left after the hay is baled turns a golden tan color. The color change take place because grass plants are not capable of recovering from large amounts of stress for quite a while. The small amount of leaf surface left on the plant is not enough to maintain the physiological activities (photosynthesis) for plant energy.

### **Flowers:**

Soil preparation is the most important aspect in maintaining areas with ornamental annuals. This begins with the addition of large quantities of organic matter to obtain optimum aeration, drainage and water holding characteristics. Generally speaking, beds should consist of at least 50% organic matter for best results. In addition, bed areas should be raised to a minimum of 4-6 inches to avoid "drowning" during wet, rainy weather. Since organic matter can be difficult to re-wet after excessive drying, a wetting agent can be used to achieve uniform water distribution throughout the soil.

Wait...don't try to jump the gun on planting! Most spring annuals can't be planted until after the danger of killing frost has passed; refer to the chart on hardiness for more

details. Many warm season plants, such as periwinkles and caladiums, cannot tolerate cool soil temperature. Delay planting until the medium reaches 70 degrees.

Discard any plants that may have reseeded themselves from last season. They'll be less vigorous and may not resemble their hybrid parents. If it's not possible for you to plant right away, keep plants in a lightly shaded spot and be sure to water them as needed. If possible, it is best to plant on a cloudy or overcast day or late in the day to reduce transplanting shock.