

Fall is for Planting

Summer is finally over. With the arrival of cooler weather it's time to take stock of your landscape. The Mid-Atlantic region suffered through a major drought this year and chances are your lawn did too. Now is the time to take a stroll through your yard and decide what needs to be replaced or removed. If your lawn needs renovation, September is the time to aerate and overseed. Remember to add composted organic material (like Leaf-Gro) before planting grass seed to reduce the need for chemical fertilizers. Newly planted grass seed will need to be watered every day until the seed germinates and fills in. Did you know that 30% of the water used by the average homeowner on the East Coast is used to irrigate the lawn? Or that a lawn of 10,000 square feet requires 10,000 gallons of water in the summer to stay green and healthy? On the other hand, there are many native plants that can survive a dry summer with much less irrigation. If you reduce your lawn area and plant native and adapted plant species you can reduce the need to water, reduce the need for chemical fertilizers and pesticides and still have a beautiful landscape. In addition, you will reduce the amount of stormwater runoff and chemical pollutants that enter the Chesapeake Bay. Many native species have the added value of attracting wildlife to your yard.

Start with a plan. You may want to begin with a small area but it will be helpful if you sketch out your whole yard so you can take into account things like sun and shade, views and other factors like drainage and topography. Begin to learn about plant species that will do well in our area. (See Resources at end of article) Keep the following in mind as you plan your new garden area:

Plant different varieties of trees, shrubs and perennials that will give you an ever-changing, year-round landscape.

For greater visual impact, plant in drifts, masses or groups rather than using single specimens. Choose plants with varying bloom times and pleasing color combinations. Generally, tall plants should be placed toward the back with shorter plants to the front.

Add a water element, such as a birdbath, pond with a re-circulating pump, or include a naturally occurring stream or wetland in your garden. The sound of moving water makes a garden come alive (and attracts birds to your landscape).

Install soaker hoses or drip irrigation in your planting beds so you can water more efficiently and less often. Apply mulch to your planting beds to reduce the number of weeds and conserve water.

By reducing the area you devote to high-maintenance turf grasses and selecting plants well suited to your region, you will cut the amount of time and money needed to maintain your yard and be able to spend more time enjoying your landscape

Happy planting!

Resources for landscaping with native plants:

<http://www.mdflora.org/>

<http://www.nps.gov/plants/pubs/chesapeake/>

<http://www.fws.gov/chesapeakebay/BayScapes/bsresources/bs-nativeguides.htm>

<http://www.dnr.state.md.us/criticalarea/trees.html>