



# Ground Cover

the official newsletter for those who dig landscaping



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Spring  
2011



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## Rising to the challenge

Lynn and Mark Weikel dreamed of a back yard space for entertaining guests with a stunning pool as the focal point. However, the steep drop in their back yard, along with the home's location on a cul-de-sac, presented numerous challenges. Was it possible to install a pool on such an incline? How could they create privacy when surrounded by homes on all sides?

"It was very important to me that the design complement the architecture of our home and be aesthetically pleasing to my neighbors. I was concerned that a 6-foot retaining wall would look terrible," said Lynn Weikel.

Rick Doesburg, president of Thornton Landscape addressed this "tall order" with some creative problem solving and unique ideas that turned the drop off into an oasis. "When the project was finished, my neighbor called me and said that when she looked at my backyard, she thought vacation," commented Lynn.

Rather than the 6-foot retaining wall Lynn feared, Doesburg designed a two-tiered solution. "We've landscaped a lot of challenging spaces, and we work the lay of the land to inspire the design. We decided the steep drop would be the perfect base to create a dramatic theater effect," he said.

The bottom tier consisted of a 3-foot retaining wall surrounding a plant bed where a wall of privacy-protecting arbor vitae was placed. The second tier was comprised of an exposed part of the pool- a gorgeous wet wall- that did double duty: on the outside, the wall is a privacy screen with a waterfall complementing the landscape design; on the inside, pool guests enjoy the waterfall from underwater benches that run the length of the wall.

To complement the architectural design of the home, tile for the wet wall was chosen to match the roof, and a deck of stamped concrete matched the mortar of the house. Landscape lighting completed the dramatic effect of the design, and an irrigation system made caring for the landscape easy.

Lynn had one more request for the pool design. She wanted a "cocktail pool" that had a depth of three feet along the outer edges and a depth of five feet in the middle to make it easier for guests to play volleyball. "With the home's walkout basement including a bar, fireplace in the round and theater, the design that Thornton Landscape created is the perfect solution to keep the entertainment flowing outside," Lynn said.

## A delicacy for your plants making green easy

Organic compost is more than a green-friendly garden option. It's a great way to nourish your garden, and it won't cost you a pretty penny. What makes it "organic" is that it is made up of materials that were once living, such as grass clippings, chopped leaves, pine needles, straw, wood and bark chips, compost and newspaper.

Why go organic?

- As it decomposes, it adds beneficial nutrients back into your soil to feed hungry plants all season long. You save money because you won't need to fertilize.
- By bagging leaves and grass clippings and hauling them to the curb, you waste time, money and take up valuable landfill space with lawn bags. Recycle these materials back into your beds.
- When buying organic compost, remember to buy locally and consider the needs of your garden.
- If you have to amend your soil, use organic compost. Over time, as it decomposes it produces valuable topsoil you'd otherwise have to spend time, money and energy procuring and spreading yourself.

Organic compost creates a beautiful garden by working from the inside out. When soil and plants are healthy below the surface, your garden will thrive and reward you with stunning results.



## Pine sawfly bug out!

Ever heard of a European pine sawfly (Neodiprion sertifer)?

Probably not, but if you have pines in your landscape, particularly the mugo pine, you may want to check out the needles this spring to make sure they aren't being devoured by these unpleasant green worms.



Related to wasps and bees, pine sawfly larvae (early stage) have green bodies and black heads and are often mistaken for caterpillar larvae. The distinction between the two is the pine sawfly's light green stripe down the middle of the back surrounded by a dark green stripe and then a white stripe above the legs.

They tend to feed on old foliage so trees are seldom killed. But the damage caused by these pests can be overwhelming, affecting its appearance and ultimately slowing growth so it's important to catch them early in the season. The eggs hatch in April through mid-May, about the same time as the lilacs bloom. The larvae feed in large groups until mid-June, stripping the needle by eating the green out of the tips and giving the tree a "paintbrush" appearance. After they consume the needles, they move on to the old growth.

When it comes to protecting your pines from these irritants, it's best to exterminate them when the larvae are still small.

- If you have a small infestation, you can knock them off by hand or with water. They rarely find their way back up the tree.
- For larger infestations, general purpose insecticides, horticultural oils, and insecticidal soaps will work.
- Refrain from cutting off the infested branch as it will prevent new growth. Only prune pines by cutting back new growth.



## Preparing for Buckeye Chuck's early spring outdoor living

In the midst of a record-setting winter, Buckeye Chuck - Ohio's cousin to the more famous Punxsutawney Phil - came out of his groundhog burrow in February and didn't see his shadow, predicting an early spring. Now that the temperature is warming, it's time to spring clean your backyard in preparation for your favorite outdoor activities.

Think of it as a chance to get a jump on spring landscaping chores:

- Rake the leaves out of your garden beds and your lawn, clear out dead plants and fill in with color from spring flowers.
- Prune your perennials and fertilize your lawn to keep it looking beautiful into the summer and fall months.
- Winter weather dries out mulch that was once protecting your trees and flowers from weeds. Now that the winter storms are over, give your plants fresh mulch.
- Trim trees and bushes to give your yard a clean and neat look.
- Start up your irrigation system and make sure that all of the valves and sprinkler heads are working properly.



Give your space these welcoming touches for the warmer weather:

- Clean outdoor furniture with a solution of hot water and mild dish soap. Brush and wipe clean furniture cushions.
- Prepare your outdoor firepit for those chilly spring nights and set aside a corner of your backyard fence for firewood from your spring clippings.
- Set up built-in umbrella stands to add shade options and prepare your outdoor kitchen for entertaining and grilling.
- Make sure your lawn is clear for tossing frisbees, playing kickball or setting up a slip and slide on warmer days.
- Set the mood with outdoor lighting. Install lights and create an impressive and warm environment in your backyard.
- If needed, give your exterior space a fresh coat of paint.

Buckeye Chuck gave us a head start this year, with a little TLC and creativity, you'll have a beautiful outdoor environment that you will enjoy throughout the spring, summer and fall.

## Diggin' the accolades

We think our work speaks for itself; however it's always nice to be recognized by our peers in the landscape industry. So we're going to brag a little and share with you our latest awards and achievements.

At the Professional Landcare Network's 41st Annual Environmental Awards, we received a Distinction Recognition in the Commercial Design/Build category for our work on Prasco's 48-acre campus in Mason.

In addition to our work, our president (and my dad) Rick Doesburg was honored by the Ohio Nursery & Landscape Association and named 2011's Distinguished Contribution Award recipient for his contributions to the landscape and nursery industry.

Rick's received a lot of congratulations since receiving the award, but one of the nicest comes from Steve Wills, executive director of Midwest Landscape Network here in Greater Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky. "Rick certainly deserves the acknowledgement. He's not just an established leader in the landscape industry in our city and our state, but he's also a leader in the nation and has been a mentor in our industry across the country," Wills said.

Our primary goal is and has always been to serve you, our customers, with custom landscapes and spaces that complement your home. We appreciate the applause, but hearing from you is our greatest reward.



## Seasonal wines

### 2008 MacMurray Ranch

**Chardonnay:** (\$17) This wine has a full-mouth feel enveloped in sweet, delicate aromas of ripe melon and passion fruit. A subtle oak influence gives the flavors of toasted caramel and vanilla. This Chardonnay is well-balanced with a full, creamy, and persistent finish.

### 2009 Grayson Cellars Cabernet

**Sauvignon "Lot 10"** (\$10) This amazing value is 100% Cabernet Sauvignon aged in 100% French oak. It boasts a dark ruby color as well as a big, rich nose of fresh blackberries. This Cabernet offers a medium body, supple tannins and surprising intensity and length for a wine of such humble cost.

### 2008 Fattoria Sonnino Leone

**Rosso** (\$12) A blend of 60% Syrah, 20% Sangiovese, 10% Canaiolo and 10% Ancellotta, this wine is modern yet unmistakably Italian. With notes of fresh spices and vanilla supporting an elegant array of red berry fruit, the taste is dry and pure with a full and fruity finish.

*These wines are recommended by Todd Wiggs, Fine Wine Manager of Jungle Jim's International Market.*

### Heritage River Birch

#### *Betula nigra 'Heritage'*

A variety of the native white-barked river birch, the Heritage River Birch is known for its unique salmon, orange, lavender, and gray combination of colored bark that peels heavily. It's an ideal shade tree for the corners of your yard. Although it thrives in cooler climates, it is often a better tree selection for the warmer Ohio climate. A fast growing tree with lightweight branches, you can expect the Heritage to reach up to 50' in height and 35' wide.



## Families you should know

### Tiger Eyes Sumac

#### *Rhus typhina*

The brilliant jewel tones that adorn this beauty will set your landscape ablaze with color throughout spring, summer and fall. The initial chartreuse leaves will give way to hues of vivid yellow accented by fuzzy purple branches. In the spring, eaves transform to shades of vivid yellow. This mid-size shrub grows to heights and widths of 6 feet and, unlike other sumac varieties, is a slow-spreader.





## To screen or not to screen?

Are you adding an outdoor living space to your home? If you're thinking of a covered porch, arbor or pergola, you may be debating the ways to enclose your space – a screen of trees, walls and windows or wire screens. When deciding whether your outdoor space will remain a covered porch or will morph into a four-season room, here are a few things to consider:

- ❑ How do you plan to use the space? If you are envisioning using it for the occasional summer evening meal alfresco, or for added seating for your next warm weather party, then a screen of trees for privacy is likely your best bet. If you are thinking along the lines of a four-season destination for game nights or a second living room, then you may need to consider enclosing the space with windows you can open and close to maintain a comfortable temperature.
- ❑ How are you with bugs? When enjoying an evening outside, especially during the summer, bugs can be a nuisance. When citronella and tiki torches won't cut it, wire screens will help you feel more comfortable outside and your space may get more use.
- ❑ How much do you want to spend? Full-scale additions with wire screens, walls and windows can raise the cost of this type of addition. A beautifully landscaped wall of trees or a hedge of shrubs can accomplish your goal without a large expense. Weigh the estimated costs of such a project with how you envision using the space.
- ❑ How much shelter do you need from the elements? Enclosing the porch can fortify it against the weather. A tree screen will help you turn a stronger wind into a pleasant breeze.
- ❑ How do you plan to furnish the room? If you are thinking of adding expensive outdoor furniture, consider a peaked pergola or covered porch that will give you a sheltered location to mount that TV without requiring a fully-enclosed space.

*Spring makes its own statement, so loud and clear that the gardener seems to be only one of the instruments, not the composer.*

– Geoffrey B. Charlesworth, author

## All dirt is not created equal

### gardening 401

What is the most important element of any landscape? Nope, it's not the choice of plants; it's soil. If it's not healthy, your plants will flounder and your best-laid plans will wilt before you. When gardening, having a dirty mind is a good thing.

Plants require soil that is rich in nutrients and is light enough for roots to move, water to moisten and drain efficiently, and air to circulate. There are four main types:

- ❑ Sand allows water to run out too easily, and it doesn't provide many nutrients.
- ❑ Silt feels smooth and powdery when dry, and when wet it becomes too compact.
- ❑ Clay is rich in nutrients, but far too dense for water, roots and air to move through.
- ❑ Loam is the ideal texture and is a healthy mix of sand, silt, clay and organic matter.

You can investigate the condition of your soil by digging up a handful and giving it a squeeze. If it doesn't clump at all and crumbles in your hand, it is probably too sandy. If it's difficult to squeeze and doesn't break apart easily, it's likely clay. If the soil clumps but breaks apart with a little pressure, it's probably in good shape.

If you're like most people in our region, you've likely discovered your soil is a long way from loam. Soil can be amended organically using compost, composted manure, sphagnum peat, wood chips and grass clippings. Inorganic choices include vermiculite, perlite and pea gravel.

The best soil is amended regularly, and a professional can give it proper attention. Your plants will thank you for it.

## Debunking gardening myths

### gardening 101

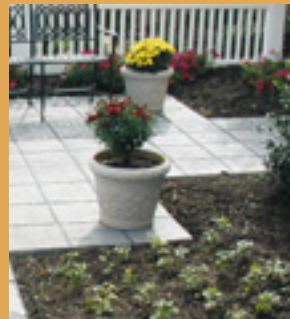
You take pride in the work you've done to help your garden thrive. You've trimmed, weeded, fertilized, watered and coaxed, and yet your plants look a bit anemic. You may have been tripped up by a common garden myth. They have made their way into our collective consciousness, but are based more on lore than on fact. Consider the following myths, debunked:

- ❑ **There's no right way to water.** Plants need about an inch of water a week. A deep soaking of water less frequently is better than a sprinkling of water daily. Test the soil by taking a handful from about an inch down near the roots of the plant. Water only when dry, and saturate roots to promote growth. Too little water encourages roots to spread near the surface and hinders plant health.
- ❑ **Organic pesticides are not toxic.** A pesticide can be harmful whether it's made from synthetic or organic materials. Use with caution and be mindful of pets and other critters you are putting at risk.

- ❑ **Putting gravel in the bottom of pots will help water drain and potted plants will thrive.** Soil reacts to water like a sponge; it soaks it up and releases it only when it cannot absorb

any more, so the addition of gravel makes no difference in a pot's ability to drain. Also, roots derive nutrients from soil, not rocks, so having less soil is like putting plants in a smaller pot. Be sure your pots have a few small drainage holes and let the soil manage the water content.

- ❑ **Perennial gardens = no work.** The only easy thing about perennial gardens is that you don't have to replant every year. They still need to be maintained in the same way your other gardens do with regular watering, fertilization, weeding and deadheading.





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