



*"Spring is the time of plans and projects."*

~ Leo Tolstoy

This time of year is a season of new initiatives and fresh starts. While our calendar year begins in the dead of winter, real motivation happens when Mother Nature turns the page in the spring. Pleasant weather invites us to shake off our winter hibernation and spend more active time outdoors. Even if the cold is not quite done with us, the slightest hint of warm weather brings with it a sense of optimism and possibility.

As our lawns come back to life, they reveal to us many areas of opportunity. While each spring brings with it a full list of necessary cleanup and maintenance tasks – the real fun comes with exploring new additions and improvements. Determining which direction to go with new landscape designs can be an exciting process that yields rewarding results. It can also be overwhelming at times. In this issue, we discuss some tips to ensure a smooth process from initial landscape planning through to completion. With the right approach, you can make the most of this season of possibility.

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## ONE STEP AT A TIME

Springtime mornings are some of the prettiest hours of the year. Spring itself is a morning of sorts when you think about it. Winter's grey sluggishness has lifted and months of outdoor activities stretch out before us.

Brand new weeds, a lawn that needs constant mowing, winter remnants that need clearing all require a lot of time. Scheduling these tasks amid a steady docket of baseball practices, graduations, proms, and weddings can be a challenge. When trying to make your yard all it can be, even a modest amount of planning goes a long way.

Having an overall plan allows you to add elements in manageable steps, with each new addition contributing to the larger picture. The first step in designing a plan is to determine what you want from your property. Should this space be more ornamental or functional?

Do you wish to maximize your outdoor living space? Is your preference more for organized plant beds, or a natural look? Will you need to account for children's (or grandchildren's) play areas? Once you have an idea of what you want your yard to be, it becomes much easier to plan individual projects.

If you feel overwhelmed by the busyness of spring, remember that some landscape enhancements are better saved for fall. You may even find that some projects should wait until next year. Laying out a manageable agenda allows you to devote an appropriate amount of time and energy to each project. It also gives you the opportunity to thoughtfully flesh out the specifics of upcoming additions. Of course, this entire process is made easier by the help of landscape professionals – so don't hesitate to ask for help in turning your vision into reality.



## Spring To do list

The following steps are helpful to keep in mind while putting together your landscape plan:

- Decide what large landscaping (plant beds, shrubs, trees) and hardscaping features (walls, patios) you will want to eventually include.
- Determine the amount of space you would like the landscaping to occupy as well as the location.
- Of this total space, how much do you want to devote to living landscaping? How much to turf? How much to developed living areas?
- Determine the overall look or feel you want to portray. Natural and rustic? Modern and artistic?
- With the help of a professional, diagram the overall layout.
- Determine the initial additions that will make the biggest impact within your allowable budget.



## SEAL THE DEAL WITH DORMANT OILS

Unwelcome insects can cause considerable damage to your landscape. Of all of your plants, trees and shrubs are the costliest and the most prominent. Oftentimes, you will not know that there is an insect problem until you catch them in the act of destroying your plants. Unfortunately, by this time they may have already done considerable damage.



Dormant oils are specialized oils that are made to coat the bark of trees and shrubs before insects have emerged. This oil cuts off the insects' necessary oxygen – killing adult insects as well as their eggs and larvae. Harmful insects are destroyed before you even see them.

A dormant oil treatment is one way to combat insects before they break into full-on feeding mode. Insects like to spend the winter inside your trees where they can lay low (and lay eggs) sheltered from the elements. In the spring, they will emerge hungry and in greater numbers.

These oils can be purchased or made at home and can be applied by you or a professional. For the best result, this treatment should be done after the winter freeze has thawed but before buds have bloomed (while the plant is still in its dormant phase). You have a lot of time and energy invested in your trees and shrubs – stopping insects before they become a problem will maintain their longevity.

## TAMING CRABGRASS

Nature in its rawest form is a beautiful thing. Dense forests, expansive prairies, windswept deserts, and towering mountains can be intensely awe-inspiring.

But nature with a human touch is beautiful in its own right. Our lawns give us a chance to harness natural beauty while adding our own unique signature. Without vigilant care however, nature will reclaim our yard – leaving it unkempt rather than majestic.

Crabgrass is an intrusive weed that seeks to establish itself throughout your lawn at the expense of your turfgrass. Although technically a grass, crabgrass is far from the rich soft carpet you want your lawn to have. Originating in Africa, crabgrass (scientifically known as *digitaria*) has coarse, thick blades that grow in clumps. The fact that this hearty plant thrives in hot, rugged conditions at one time made it a great food for livestock. Unfortunately, these once valuable traits now make crabgrass a ruthless adversary to your lawn.

Fighting such an enemy requires a multi-pronged approach. Herbicides play a big part in stopping crabgrass and other weeds. A pre-emergent treatment can halt advancing crabgrass before it has sprouted by forming a barrier that covers the surface of your entire lawn. Post-emergent herbicide can be used as a spot treatment once weeds are actually present. One challenging aspect of crabgrass is that your lawn may be under siege long before you see any physical crabgrass growth. Before the summer heat spurs on visible crabgrass growth, millions of seeds lie in waiting. So don't hesitate to explore pre-emergent options while the weather is still cool. What you cannot see is just as damaging as what you can.

While chemical treatments help, the best defense in fighting crabgrass and other weeds is a good offense. Weeds are locked in competition with your turf, so the healthier your lawn, the harder it is for weeds to thrive. Keeping your grass fed with fertilizer, mowing at an appropriate height, and watering your lawn on a regular schedule will bolster your turf's health and keep weeds at bay.

Weeds are one of the biggest obstacles your lawn and landscaping will face. With the right strategy in place, you can enjoy nature's beauty while keeping its wilder elements at bay.



Besides being incredibly hearty, crabgrass is programmed to spread in rampant fashion. A single crabgrass plant can produce 150,000 seeds! Oftentimes, these seeds will germinate the following spring in the same area of the parent plant.





# DON'T BE AFRAID OF SHADE

When it comes to your lawn and landscaping, it is easy to see shade as an obstacle rather than an opportunity. It is difficult for many plants, including turfgrass, to grow in shady areas. Often these spaces end up underutilized.

It is easy to forget that shade can be a valuable commodity – especially during the dog days of summer. With a little effort and imagination, a previous eyesore can become a welcome refuge from the summer heat. Some plants such as hostas, hydrangeas, and begonias prefer the shade over blazing sunshine.

In muddy areas where turf struggles, try a groundcover of some kind. Plants like ajuga and mazus grow aggressively in cool shady areas and provide a unique alternative to turf. Mosses are another non-traditional plant that form a rich, durable carpet in areas of limited sunlight. Top things off with a few chairs or a hammock and your once-wasted space becomes a cool oasis to be enjoyed all summer long.



## SYCAMORES: THE WHITE GIANTS

In the summer, their expansive branches and broad leaves provide cool shade. In the winter, their hallmark splotchy white bark stands out amongst the dull brown hues of surrounding leafless trees. Across the eastern United States, the sycamore is one of our nation's noblest trees.

Dating back to ancient Persia, the sycamore was revered by kings for its beauty. Mature trees tower over a hundred feet in the air. The bark's unique appearance is due to its rigid, inflexible nature. As the trunk grows, older bark flakes off, revealing the inner layer of white or off-white bark. These trees love water, which causes them to oftentimes grow around wetlands or follow creek or riverbeds.

These trees would make a great addition to any property if not for the fact that they are susceptible to a specific fungal disease (plane anthracnose disease). Because of this, most nurseries do not carry sycamores. They do, however, usually carry London plane trees which are quite similar to sycamores, but resistant to this specific disease. London planes are commonly used in landscaping and offer shade and beauty just like their cousins.

# IS YOUR LAWN DROWNING?

Spring showers are responsible for the vibrant explosion of plant life that makes this time of the year unique. At times, these showers can give us more rain than we asked for, and more than our lawns know what to do with. When it collects, excess rainwater can turn your lawn into a muddy swamp. While all plants need water, too much water can rot root systems and eventually kill off valuable pieces of your landscaping. Standing water is also an ideal breeding ground for troublesome mosquitoes. When water pools close to your house's foundation, there can be seepage into your home. Improper drainage is not just unsightly – it can be very damaging to your property.

There are a variety of ways to maximize your yard's drainage. Buried drainage pipes and/or gravel-filled trenches are the best ways to remove large amounts of water. These options, however, are also the most disruptive and costly.

Another way to address drainage issues is with your landscaping itself. Certain plants thrive in wet areas, and building a water garden is a great way to incorporate these plants (e.g. irises and elephant ears) into your landscape. Willows and plane trees love water and can absorb huge amounts out of the ground. Replacing swampy areas with rocks, gravel, and water-loving plants can turn a trouble spot into an attractive and unique area of your yard. An ornamental pond can be a gathering pool for runoff while acting as a central feature that can house cattails, lily pads, and even fish.

Adequate drainage is not a very exciting aspect of landscaping, but it only takes a few downpours to realize its necessity. Fortunately, there are multiple ways that you can make sure your lawn handles water as best as possible. If you have questions, concerns, or ideas about the best course of action – feel free to consult a professional.



# SPRING CLEANING PAYS OFF

Spring is here! If it has not already, your yard is ready to spring to life at any moment. Before new growth is in full swing, you will want to make sure that you have done your part to ready the way for Mother Nature to do her thing.

Chances are that the winter has left debris of one kind or another in your flower beds. Sticks, left over fall leaves, and old growth from last season's annuals accumulate over the colder months and create obstacles to emerging perennials. Clearing the beds before perennials sprout is a much easier process than trying to remove debris as you try not to damage new growth.



Winter may have taken its toll on your trees and shrubs and now is the time to prune away any dead, dying, or damaged limbs or branches. Before new buds have bloomed, it is easy to identify which branches need to go. Pruning early also helps your trees and shrubs be more efficient by focusing new growth towards the healthy parts of the plant.

Finally, you will want to make sure any power equipment you own is ready for action. Hopefully your hardware will not need any major repairs, but if it does, be sure to address these early. Repair shops' schedules will soon be crowded and you will be happy that you beat the rush. Even if your mower is running great, freshly sharpened blades result in clean-looking, healthy turf.

Spring should be exciting, not overwhelming. Thorough cleanup and lawn prep can eliminate springtime stress.



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## Check It Out!

Our logo and website may be new, but our high quality work is as good as ever. Our newly-designed website includes examples of some of our recent projects and detailed descriptions of the services we offer. Check it out!

