

FLAK'S NEWS

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Member,
Minnesota Nursery and
Landscape Association

*"Creating and caring for
your environment"*

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Thank You for Eight Wonderful Years!

Where does the time go? It seems as though I was just writing articles for last year's newsletter! Family life has been as busy as ever, although this time of year is a slower time for my family. The holidays are but a memory, winter sports are over and my children haven't gotten into the throws of their spring sports yet. And I have completed most of the projects on my wife's "honey do" list! It's a nice "calm" before the spring storm! Winter is also my time to attend the Minnesota Nursery and Landscape Association's (MNLA) annual convention. I continue to remain active on the MNLA Certification Committee which is responsible for

training and testing anyone in the "Green" industry to be well-versed in the many aspects of the business (Certified Nursery and Landscape Professional-CNLP). I am also still serving on the MNLA Landscape Design Committee and actively participating on all industry "Legislative Alerts". My involvement in these areas keeps me aware of upcoming trends, concerns, and issues facing landscaping and related businesses. Of course, my work days are a little shorter during the winter months, although I continue to meet with customers about their upcoming projects. No matter how much snow is on the ground at the

moment, I can feel that spring is just around the corner. This is the time for me to plan, organize, and prepare for the upcoming season, but also to think about past seasons and count my blessings. As I reflect on the past eight years, the satisfaction of owning my own company is far outweighed by the pleasure of working with such wonderful customers! I have worked with some of you over many years and on several different projects! Many of you have recommended my company to your friends, neighbors, and family. I couldn't have done it without you! Thank you all!

Greg Flakne, **CNLP**

Water—Make it SAFE and FUN for Kids!

Have you ever noticed how children gravitate toward water the minute they go outside? Be it a gutter, puddle, or pond, children naturally find the wet stuff. I speak from experience with my own two boys! Many customers have admittedly denied themselves the pleasures of water features in their yards because they fear for the safety of their young children. Of course, children should ALWAYS be supervised near water, as they can drown in as little as two inches of

water. But with sound safety procedures and a little creativity, fountains, ponds, streams, waterfalls, and pools can all be included in your landscape plans!

Small fountains and ponds may be a good place to begin. Grids can be installed for safety if very young children will be splashing there. Simulated streams can be created to wind throughout the yard. Submersible electric pumps perform magic in carrying water from one area to a lower point below,

with the water cascading over rock formations, creating "rapids" and waterfalls along the way. All, without being too deep. Water loving plants placed strategically, add interest and soften the edges of these man-made streams.

Water features are soothing to the soul—to be enjoyed while relaxing outdoors or inside your home! I guarantee you will be entertained by all the wildlife attracted there—especially the children!

Birds and Butterflies



Northern Cardinal

The most interesting bird gardens have **natural** bird feeders. Trees, shrubs, vines, flowers, and grasses that produce berries, seeds, and nuts provide a variety of food, as well as shelter for birds. Water is also a year-round necessity for bathing and drinking. That pump in your fountain, stream, or pond will keep the water flowing during the winter months. The birds will love it!

Birds love variety! Firs, Juniper, Spruce, Pine, Eastern Red Cedar, Yews, Maple, and Oak provide shelter, nuts, berries, and seeds. Fruit loving birds are attracted to Serviceberry, Hackberry, Dogwood, Crabapple, and Cherry trees. Winterberry, Blueberry, Viburnum, Dogwood, and Black Chokeberry are fruit producing shrubs. And flowers, such as Coreopsis and Aster, supply birds with seeds throughout late summer and fall.

Butterflies need sun, water, shelter from winds, and of course, something sweet to eat! A carefully planted garden will attract many types of butterflies! Shrubs such as Buddleia, Clethra, Spirea, Mohican Viburnum, Weigela, and Lilac provide needed shelter, as well as delicious nectar. Joe Pye Weed, Purple Coneflower, Daylily, Phlox, Sedum, Verbena, Zinnia, and Yarrow are favorite flowers of butterflies. Ask me how to incorporate these into your yard for a garden you and the butterflies will enjoy!



Black Swallowtail on colorful phlox

How's Your Night Life?

In Minnesota, we live about half of our lives in the daylight hours. This also means that about half of our lives are spent in the dark! If you have invested any kind of time and money on your home's landscaping, don't you want to see it? I can't say it often enough, "Landscape lighting is the best way to enhance and personalize your home's appearance, once the landscaping is complete." It's the icing on the cake! Landscape lighting offers the dramatic play between light and shadow, and allows you the pleasure of enjoying your landscape at night. Of course, an obvious argument for outdoor lighting is that it provides lighting for safety and security. But a lighting designer (that's me!) can help to make an architectural statement with the technical knowledge and creativity You just provide a small amount of electricity!



Why hire a lighting designer?

When the large home discount stores sell several brands of "do-it-yourself" outdoor lighting kits, why would anyone need a lighting designer? I don't want to knock anyone who has installed any of these lights because at least you have taken the steps to try to beautify your nightscape. But many of these kits include cheaply made lighting fixtures, which may not only fail to work properly after just a short use, but they often supply a light source which glares, rather

than provide soft, subtle, directional lighting.

There are also many area lighting contractors who can install higher quality fixtures and systems in your yard. But landscape lighting requires more than the know-how of a low voltage lighting contractor. It is an art, as is landscaping. It is my job, as a designer, to know your landscape—which

features to dramatize—trees, shrubs, decks, sidewalks, patios, walls, fences, and water features. I can work with you to determine the focal points, traffic patterns, areas of use, style, and mood that is to be created.

Details Details Details...

For the most elegant effect, all the lighting around your home should be of the same intensity. It is important to coordinate existing outdoor lighting (porch lights, garage lights, and under eave lights, etc.) into the new landscape lighting system. I



recommend using low voltage systems for landscape lighting. Transformers reduce the 120-volt line voltage at the outlet to just 12 volts. This creates a safer electrical system which is more efficient and looks better too!

“Smart” Lighting

To achieve the desired dramatic effect, some or all of the existing lights may need to be dimmed, and glare and hot spots need to be eliminated. This helps blend existing lights with the new low voltage landscape lighting. And today’s technology can create this dramatic effect without you giving it a second thought! By installing a “smart” controller/timer with “smart” dimmer switches, the brighter lights can be controlled. With the combined use of these “smart” switches and a “smart” photocell, all outdoor lights can

also be programmed to turn on and off at the times you designate. Most people want their outdoor lighting to turn on at dusk. But you can determine which lights turn on at what times. Perhaps you prefer all the outdoor lights to go on at dusk, but only want certain lights to remain on all night for safety. No problem! The combination of the photocell and the timer can communicate to certain lights to automatically turn off at midnight, or any other time you designate, while leaving the safety lights on until dawn.

So many ways to create drama:

Pathlighting uses low fixtures, which direct the light downward and outward. These light fixtures are shielded on top to prevent glare. They provide a soft, downward glow on shrubs in a landscape bed. They also illuminate sidewalks, driveways, stairs, decks, or anywhere that safe access is required at night.

Wallwashing is a technique that uses flood light fixtures to cast light across large surfaces such as a large wall or fence. If the light is placed behind shrubs or trees (**backlighting**), they appear as silhouettes. With the technique of **shadowing** or **grazing**, the light source is placed in front of trees or shrubs, creating soft shadows on the wall.

Uplighting focuses light and attention on something from a lower vantage point, with the light shining upward. Uplighting provides an intriguing effect on a large tree, with lights shining up the trunk and into the branches. Shrubs also take on a special glow when lit from below. And exterior walls, fences, gazebos and arbors appear softened with this technique.

Downlighting is the technique of illuminating from above. Spotlights can be used to pinpoint light down to a particular feature. For example, I use downlighting frequently under decks to shed light on patios below. Another form of downlighting is called **Moonlighting**. Fixtures can be placed high in mature trees to flood light down through the branches to create a soft, shadowy effect below.



Putting it all together:

Of course, a combination of these techniques will enhance the evening appearance of your home. If you’re like most people, your home is the single biggest investment you will ever make. More and more of my customers are now enjoying their investment for an extended period of time. Curb appeal, of course improves substantially with outdoor lighting, but I bet you will find that **you** enjoy your yard more in the evenings, even from **inside** your home!

The photos in this article were taken of some of my lighting projects by Hans and Pat Petruska of Petruska Photography. Petruskaphotography.com



FLAKNE'S NEWS

FLAKNE'S EXTERIOR DESIGN/SCAPE CO.

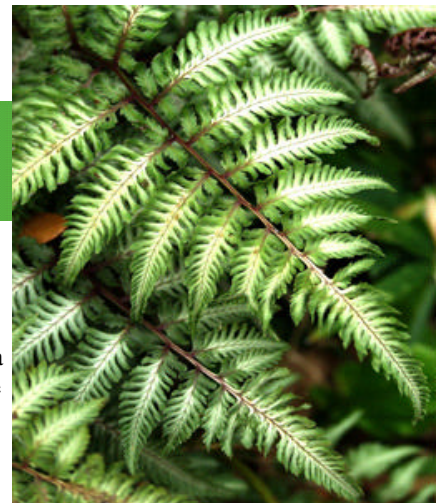


Your satisfaction is my success



2004 Perennial Plant of the Year

ATHYRIUM NIPONICUM
'Pictum'



The Perennial Plant Association has announced the Perennial Plant of the year 2004 is *Athyrium niponicum*, 'Pictum'. Commonly known as the Japanese Painted Fern, it is one of the showiest ferns and is an excellent choice for shady gardens. It grows well nearly everywhere in the U.S., even Minnesota! "Pictum" grows to 18 inches tall and will make a clump more than two feet in diameter as it multiplies. Its fronds are a beautiful, soft shade of metallic silver-gray with hints of red and blue. For the best color and growth, this fern needs light shade and well-drained, compost-rich soil. It loves moisture and humidity. For more information, go to: <http://www.perennialplant.org/ppy/04ppy.htm>