

FLAK'S NEWS

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Member,
Minnesota Nursery and
Landscape Association

*"Creating and caring for
your environment"*

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Counting my blessings...

Each winter, I take the time to regroup, clean my office, review the previous year's projects, and plan for the upcoming season. And each winter, I count my blessings: another record breaking season, my new clients, new opportunities, and my loyal customers I have been honored to serve over many years. Of course, today in our very changed world, I

think we all are taking more stock in our blessings. We hold our families and friends a bit closer. We fill our days with more meaningful thoughts and deeds. In a time when having a beautiful yard would rank low on a list of "what really matters in our world", I can only be thankful that those of you whom I will continue to serve, are "getting back to

normal", thus allowing me to stay in business and support my family! And I am most thankful to live in this country that allows me to work hard in a field of my choosing and for the opportunity to try to make this world a more beautiful place, one yard at a time.

Greg Flakne, *CNLP*

ARCHES, PERGOLAS, & ARBORS

Pergolas and arches have long been used successfully in gardens to provide strong vertical elements. They can be used to frame a particular view and they offer a shady spot in which to relax or entertain. Pergolas can create a shady walkway or an arbor, and offer beautiful color with climbing plants.

Arches have been used since the Middle Ages to create grand entrances. The first garden arches were built from wrought iron or brick and would highlight an opening in a garden wall or form a link between two separate areas within one garden. Arches have only been decorated with shrubs and climbing plants during the past one hundred

years or so.

A pergola is a series of arches linked together to form a simple framework, usually wooden posts and beams, and usually supporting climbing plants.

The original pergolas can be traced back to ancient Egyptian times and were used to support grapes. They provided much needed shade in addition to being decorative. As the pergola idea spread to more temperate climates, they became more ornamental

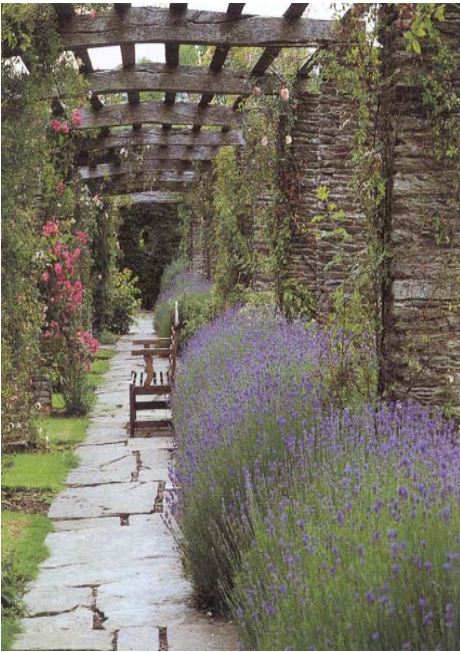
The original arbors were shady tunnels formed by training trees such as linden and sycamore to grow over a framework of metal arches. These tunnels would usually lead to a bright and open space.



Rose covered arch

Some arbors were also developed as secluded outdoor rooms.

Today's arches, pergolas, and arbors are primarily ornamental and can provide a cool and aromatic place to relax in your great outdoors. Construc-



A traditional pergola

tion can be contemporary or Victorian in style, but must be sturdy enough to hold the weight of the greenery once it is fully matured for the season. Climbers that grow well in Minnesota are perennial vines such as Bittersweet, Clematis, Honeysuckle, Hydrangea, and many new hardy climbing shrub roses. Imagine color, shade, or a serene hide-away—these structures can add a new dimension to your outdoor living!

Figuring Out Fertilizer

Fertilizer bags list the nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium contents as a series of three numbers. A blend of 20-5-10 contains 20% nitrogen, 5% phosphorus, and 10% potassium. A soil test will tell you which blend to buy. If your soil is already high in phosphorus and potassium, you should buy a fertilizer with a blend similar to: 34-0-0 or 45-0-0. If your soil is low in these nutrients, you will need to purchase a blend similar to: 20-5-10 or 18-5-9.

* read information under phosphorus heading at right about possible new legislation on banning phosphorus.

Lawn Care Made Easy

Do you ever notice how some of your neighbors have perfectly green and flawless lawns? The most frequently asked question I am asked is, "How do I get my lawn to look healthier?" Creating a beautiful lawn is simple if the lawn is kept healthy. Just follow these simple guidelines (or find a good lawn service and make sure they follow them) and YOU will be the envy of your neighborhood. First a review of Plant Physiology 101...

Fertilizing:

For established lawns, I recommend that you do the most fertilizing in the late summer months and in the fall. This will keep your lawn greener longer in the fall and will allow for an earlier greening in the spring. Late season fertilizing will promote higher levels of plant energy reserves in the following spring and summer months and will also give your lawn better tolerance against summer stresses and diseases. When fertilizing, divide the fertilizer needed for your lawn in two and cover the area twice, alternating directions of your applications. This will help prevent streaking and burning. Always water your lawn immediately after fertilizing. Make sure you sweep up any fertilizer that spills or is over sprayed onto paved surfaces to prevent it from ending up in our beautiful waterways!

When fertilizing your lawn, there are normally three nutrients to consider: nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), and potassium (K). Of course, there are other nutrients that are necessary for healthy lawn growth, but nature usually provides them in ample amounts.

Nitrogen:

Nitrogen helps the grass to grow and also produces the rich, dark green color. How much nitrogen is needed? Every lawn is a bit different. The more a lawn is watered, the more nitrogen is needed during the growing season. Grass clippings that are allowed to fall back onto the lawn provide some nitrogen, but usually not enough to keep up with the needs of a

growing lawn. It is usually necessary to add additional nitrogen by fertilizing. Nitrogen fertilizers come in **soluble** materials (quickly available to lawn) and **slow release** materials (slowly available to lawn). The water soluble fertilizers make the nitrogen available immediately and a sudden growth spurt will occur, followed by a fast depletion of the available nitrogen. If this type of fertilizer is used, it will be necessary to make frequent applications to see a uniform growth over a period of time. If too much of this type of fertilizer is used at one time, your lawn could "burn". The slow release nitrogen materials depend on the temperature of the soil, microbes, and moisture to gradually decompose the materials and make the nitrogen available to the plants. This occurs over a longer period of time. Hot weather and ample water will increase the absorption of the nitrogen. Most good fertilizer products on the market today have a combination of fast and slow releasing nitrogen so you will see immediate benefits and long lasting results.

Phosphorus:

Phosphorus stimulates early root growth. It binds tightly to the soil particles which means that it stays in the soil for a long period of time. If your soil has a sufficient supply of phosphorus, as most metro area lawns should, you probably won't need to add supplemental phosphorus. In fact, the Minnesota House and Senate are very close to passing a bill prohibiting the use of phosphorus in fertilizers, as this compound contributes to algae growth in our lakes and streams. If/when this bill becomes law, beginning in 2004, phosphorus-free fertilizers will dominate garden center shelves and it would be a misdemeanor to fertilize with phosphorus in the seven county metro area. New lawns would be exempt, as would lawns proven to be low in phosphorus. A simple soil test can indicate a need for phosphorus. A reputable lawn service can test your soil for you. The University of Min-

nesota also offers a testing service. Call Info-U for information (612) 624-2200 and enter 468 to hear about soil testing. You can also view this same information online:

www.extension.umn.edu/info-u/plants/BG468.html

Potassium:

Potassium helps in the synthesis of some plant components and in the regulation of many physiological processes. In a nutshell, if your lawn is low in potassium, it will be prone to diseases and environmental stresses. Like phosphorus, it binds tightly to the soil particles so it is broken down and utilized very slowly. If your lawn has a sufficient supply of potassium, you most likely will not need to add supplements of this nutrient. If your lawn is low in potassium, which is typical in sandy soils, it is very important to add potassium to your lawn to maintain optimum health.

Confused? If your lawn is not healthy, I recommend that you have your soil tested to get an accurate diagnosis of the problem. If your lawn seems to be responding to your efforts, keep up what you are doing and continue showing off your gorgeous green!

Mowing:

Mowing on a schedule will keep your lawn thick, smooth, uniform, and will keep the weeds at bay. (Weeds don't want to compete with a healthy lawn!) How often should you mow? It depends on how fast your lawn is growing. You should mow no more than 1/3 of the length of the grass at each mowing. So to keep a healthy 2-3" lawn (can be slightly shorter for fast growing lawns), your lawn needs to be cut before it has grown to 3-4" long.

Watering:

Fortunately, turf grasses can survive the dry periods we experience in Minnesota. We usually get enough rain in the spring and fall to permit excellent growth and color in our lawns. But during the dry spells of summer it may be necessary to give your lawn between one and one and a half inches of water each week. Keep track of any rain your lawn receives, if any, then you will need to make up the difference!

Aeration:

Aeration is the removal of small cores of soil from the lawn. This helps reduce compaction of the soil and enables the grass roots to expand into the soil. Aeration also helps create a more durable lawn that is more resistant to disease and drought. The plugs of thatch and soil will break apart and disappear into your lawn after a few weeks. Thatch is the accumulation of tightly meshed, dead and living stems and roots that build up between the surface of the soil and the grass. If the layer of thatch becomes more than 1/2" thick, your lawn's root system can be compromised. Disease and insects can take advantage of a



weaker system and dry spots may appear. Aerating your lawn is a very effective way to get thatch to decompose and reduce thatch build-up. Meanwhile, the aeration holes will begin to fill with actively growing roots resulting from the additional oxygen, moisture and nutrients provided by the aeration process.

Aerate a new lawn in spring and fall for the first few years, then at least one time per year once the lawn is more established. With repeat aerations over time, your lawn's root system will become more dense and grow deeper into the soil. You should be able to increase the time between waterings without your lawn showing wilt and stress. And your lawn will have a greater tolerance of heat,

drought, and disease.

Controlling Weeds:

Maintaining a thick, healthy, green lawn is the best weed control there is. A lawn that is properly fertilized, mowed, watered, and aerated will defend itself against weed infiltration. If a few pesky weeds crop up, use herbicides to kill them.

The best way to control annual grass weeds such as crabgrass is to use preemergent herbicides in areas where crabgrass was observed the previous year. These chemicals kill the plants just after the seeds germinate. To be effective, it should be applied by May 15 in a normal year (if you can figure out what a normal

year is!).

Broadleaf weeds, such as dandelion, plantain, clover, or creeping charlie can be controlled by selective postemergent herbicides without damaging the grass plants. Apply when the weeds are young. Take care not to overspray onto desirable broadleaf plants, flowers, shrubs, trees.

Most perennial grass weeds such as quack grass or tall fescue can be controlled with chemicals by using non-selective postemergent herbicides. These chemicals kill all plants, including the grass, so reseeding may be necessary. Always carefully read and follow all instructions on the herbicide label before using.

FLAKNE'S NEWS

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2002 Perennial Plant of the Year

Phlox **'David'**

The Perennial Plant Association has awarded the title of **Perennial Plant of the year 2002** to *Phlox* 'David'. 'David' is an erect perennial 36-40 inches tall with opposite, glossy leaves. The leaves are thin with bristly hairs on the edges. The white flower panicles are 6 to 9 inches long and 6 to 8 inches wide. The florets are 1 inch in diameter and very fragrant! *Phlox* 'David' is a long-blooming perennial and grows best in full sun to partial shade and in moist, but well-drained soil. *Phlox* 'David' is fairly resistant to powdery mildew but plants should be thinned to four to six stems to prevent heavy masses. This will increase air circulation around the leaves and help prevent against mildew. *Phlox* should be watered at the base of the plant and not on the foliage.