

Progressive Gardening

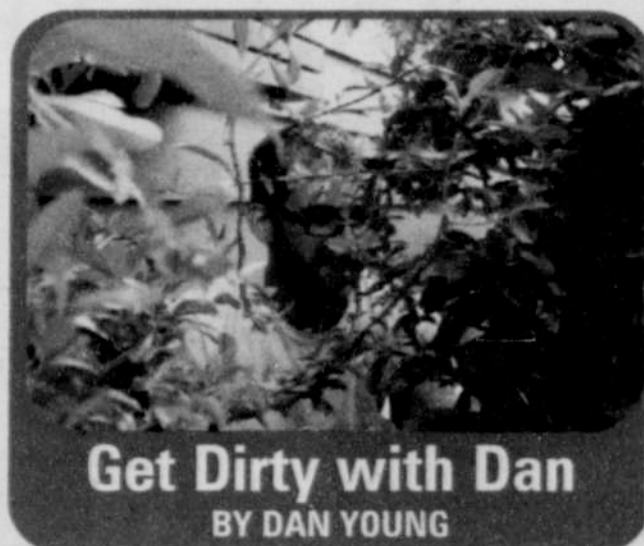
Vote no on water-hogging lawns

The signs of summer are right around the corner. I've already noticed browning grass and scorched leaves on my rides home from work. With Pride weekend upon us, this can only mean one thing. No, not just short shorts season, sillies. It means that there will be very little (read: no) rain for the next three to four months. That's quite a long time between drinks for a lot of plants unless you pull out your hose. Or make some water smart plant choices.

As members of the queer community, I like to think that we are the cutting edge of a lot of things: music, art, design, oh and fashion! So I ask myself, why not throw gardening on that list? The thought of ripping out your lawn and planting a tasteful assortment of drought-tolerant plants is pretty progressive to some people, but it shouldn't be to us, right? In a city that is constantly growing, there is bound to be a strain on our natural resources. If we want to have the best yards on the block, let's make them not only pretty but also conservation-minded, preserving what precious resources we do have. If water-hogging lawns were and still are thought of as an object of status, why shouldn't we think of a drought-tolerant landscape the same way?

It might seem weird to talk about drought-tolerant plants in a place like Portland where the first thing leaping to people's minds is rain. But the reality is that our landscape sustains a very long dry season. Of course, plants native to the Portland area will grow and thrive, but by summer's end, many will look as if they have been ridden hard and hung up to dry if they aren't watered. Even drought-tolerant plants might need a little extra water here and there in the summer. My take is that watering something once a month or once a year is better than every other day.

I've noticed something that happens when you choose certain plants in our climate. If they not



only come from a place similar to ours with wet winters and dry summers, but also one that has less rainfall, exciting things happen. They explode. A lot of these plants—some of them had starring roles in my last column—seem to do better here than they do in their native soil. The added rainfall really gives them the added boost they need to flourish. It also gives them the ability to coast through our shorter dry period with ease and grace. That, to me, makes a great garden plant.

Maybe it's because I work with plants every day that I have become so sensitive to an unhappy bloom. Or it could be my own lack of enthusiasm for standing out in my yard, hose in hand, making sure everyone out there gets a drink that has made me garden the way I do. I just like being able to spend my time enjoying my garden. I like knowing that I can leave for a week in the summer without having to hire a baby sitter for my yard. I also really like that the plants I've spent time and money on will be fine without me.

I'm not the first Portlander to think about this concept, and I certainly hope that I'm not the last. Joy Creek Nursery is proving this theory with the extensive work it has done on the dry borders at its shop in Scappoose and with its "hell strip" plantings near Reed College. Cistus Nursery on Sauvie Island implements this approach as well with a lush Mediterranean border display garden. Both places prove that you can have a garden in the Portland area without a need for heavy (or any) summer irrigation. And they are anything but boring and dowdy during our rainless months. In fact, these gardens are alive with color and texture through the dry season, standing out and proud against the brown summer landscape. ©

JOY CREEK NURSERY is at 20300 N.W. Watson Road, Scappoose. For more information visit www.joycreek.com. CISTUS NURSERY is at 22711 N.W. Gillihan Road, Sauvie Island. For more information visit www.cistus.com.

To reach DIRTY DAN, who will answer any and all of your gardening questions, simply e-mail dirtythegardener@yahoo.com.



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