

HEALTHY PLANTS FOR A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

Landscaping brings a natural calm to the hurried urban sprawl.

For millions of Americans worn from days spent in sterile business centers, our parks, golf courses and recreational areas lend a breath of fresh air. Businesses increasingly recognize the benefits of providing ornamentals — trees, shrubs, plants and flowers — in and around work areas. Attractive landscapes are linked to above-average labor productivity, lower absenteeism and easier recruitment.

In addition, homeowners view money spent on gardening and landscaping as an investment in their property and personal well-being.

To achieve healthy, thriving ornamental plants, a combination of cultural practices and specialty pesticides is key. Proper application of specialty pesticides increases the benefits gained by timely irrigation, weeding and aeration of the soil.

Plants do more than create an attractive landscape. They absorb heat and provide shade, reducing solar radiation and reflection. Plants can reduce or increase wind speed and enhance dew formation, says Richard Harris of the Department of Environmental Horticulture at the University of California-Davis.

Plants also modify wind patterns by blocking, guiding, deflecting and filtering air flow. Shrubs and ornamentals moderate cold temperatures; they also reduce heat loss and build an insulating buffer of air around buildings.

Well-designed and maintained landscapes provide the benefits of a natural environment with limited worry. Fertilizer applications encourage ground cover growth on slopes, while specialty pesticides keep insect and disease problems in check.

Flowers, shrubs and other ornamental plants add beauty to the landscape, prevent erosion, save energy, help prevent fire damage and increase property values.

EROSION AND POLLUTION CONTROL

Plants intercept rain, softening the impact that might otherwise loosen soil particles and wash them away. Mulch, commonly used in bedding areas, allows water to filter into the soil and slows surface movement; water enters the soil close to where it falls. Plant roots hold soil and further reduce erosion.

Indoor and outdoor plants also reduce air pollutants. Plant tissue, primarily leaves, absorbs gaseous pollutants.

"Plants not only absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen into the atmo-



Plants, flowers and shrubs planted alongside business centers, such as this shopping mall, lend diversity to the landscape.

D I D Y O U K N O W ?

An attractive landscape, complete with shrubs, trees and flowering plants, delivers a number of benefits to property and people alike. Aided by insect- and weed-control measures, healthy ornamentals and plant beds:

- Positively impact the environment. Plants absorb heat and provide shade, as well as modify wind speed and air flow. They filter air pollutants and reduce soil erosion. A well-maintained landscape aids in fire prevention and control.
- Improve people's moods. Studies have found plants positively affect human health by reducing stress and increasing a sense of well-being.
- Increase property values. When selling a home, homeowners can expect to recoup 100 percent to 200 percent of their investment in landscaping. Home buyers pay close attention to landscaping.



Research has found that plants have a positive impact on human health and mood. They serve as stress-reducers and spirit boosters.

sphere, but the plant leaves, roots and soil combine to act as a highly effective air scrubber and cleaning machine," reports Dr. Bill Wolverton of the Plants for Clean Air Council, an advocacy group based in Reston, Va.

PEOPLE AND PLANTS

Humans experience a sense of well-being when around plants, research indicates. Psychologists have found an attractive landscape reduces stress significantly. A Kansas State University study found people begin to relax within five to eight minutes of being placed in a room with a foliage plant.

The positive influence of plants on hospitalized or confined patients is well-documented. One study found hospitalized patients with a view of plants recovered in 7.9 days, compared with 8.7 days for a control group. They also required less potent painkillers, experienced fewer complications and reported a much more positive hospital stay.

Other studies found significant increases in conversation among patients, time spent in the dining room and food intake when flowering plants were placed in hospital dining rooms.

PROPERTY ADVANTAGES

The desire to live closer to nature has prompted many Americans to move to wooded areas. Such scenic places, however, often are prone to wildfires. A well-maintained landscape helps protect residences bordering wooded areas.

"The greener your landscaping is...the better chance it has of stopping a fire from spreading," says T.G. Tomberg, battalion chief of the Santa Barbara, Calif., fire department. "Healthy, green trees, shrubs and lawns are one (defense) that could prevent a house from catching fire."

Additionally, especially in a soft economy, landscaping can raise property values. According to a recent survey of nearly 200 California apprais-



Landscaping, complete with a variety of ornamentals, increases property values and can speed up selling a home by five to six weeks. Attractive landscapes have curb appeal, real estate agents say.

ers and real estate professionals, a well-landscaped home increases property values significantly and can speed up selling time by five to six weeks.

When prospective buyers approach a home, the landscape is among the first things they notice. Real estate agents estimate 95 percent of house shoppers won't even get out of their cars if the home lacks curb appeal. The same applies to business centers trying to lease office space.

Money magazine estimates homeowners can expect to recover 100 percent to 200 percent of landscaping investment when selling their homes.

In addition to visual and environmental benefits, plants handle a variety of other tasks. They can direct pedestrian and vehicular traffic, as well as enhance the appearance of roadways. Likewise, shrubs screen headlight glare from oncoming traffic.

But for many, the greatest benefit is the personal enjoyment landscaping provides. Strategic use of specialty pesticides and mechanical controls ensures healthy plants for today's healthy lifestyles.