For Those Who Love Galveston Island ~ The Playground of the Southwest

The Islander

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Priceless
Ready, Set, Plant!

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As I sit here at my desk writing, it is the first week of October and still ninety degrees! Way too hot still to do much in the garden. We have been promised relief next week, so as you read this missive, I am assuming that the weather has cooperated and we can finally head to our gardens with trowels in hand.

I have planned and planned again while awaiting this grand day. I have sketched plans, designed flowerbeds in my dreams and waited as recommended by the experts and the city. Wait until November they said! Okay...here we go ready or not!

While we were waiting, an interesting and informative seminar was held at the convention center, the Fall Landscape Revival, “a presentation aimed at bringing contentment back to your home landscape.” This was a cooperative effort of Texas A&M Urban Forestry Service, the Texas AgriLife Extension Service, Galveston County AgriLife Extension Service, Galveston County Master Gardeners, the City of Galveston and the Galveston Island Convention Center.

The information presented encompassed a variety of topics being faced by those of us that are dealing with what to do after the devastation to our trees, gardens and yards from Hurricane Ike. A short overview of the presentation follows for those of you who were unable to attend the seminar.

Perennials and Shrubs-Notable Survivors & Moving Forward

Discussed were survivors like bottlebrush, oleander, yuccas and periwinkles, elephant ears, cannas, sago palms as well as bougainvillea, Easter lily, crinums, daylily and amaryllis.

Also cited was the undying spirit of Galvestonians in general “Galvestonians are a resilient breed...always durable, enduring difficulty with stalwart adaptability. Yes, we will mourn the loss of our trees; yes, we will shed tears; we may even question if we could have done more to save them but we will get on about our business. We will welcome the seedlings that will be offered to us, search for hardy fast growing vegetation and replant this island.”

Replacement of Landscape Trees-What We learned from Ike

The use of survivors, native and adapted trees was noted and a list of suggested trees, large and not so large was available. Among those were bald cypress, Mexican sycamore, hickory, elm, and a favorite of mine, the incredible jacaranda. Smaller trees discussed were yaupon, Texas redbud, vitex, huisache and Mexican Poinciana.

Palm Selection- Making the Right Choice

Many palms survived the hurricane and the later drought season with seemingly little ramifications so there remain many choices to be had. Some palms on the recommended list include Texas Sabal Palm, California Fan Palm and the Canary Island Date Palm.

Soil Preparation and Planting

General information on the use of fertilizers and soil additives was presented. Remember to use no or low phosphorous fertilizers (low second number). Apply to target area only to avoid contamination of surface and groundwater resources. Store fertilizers safely and securely.

Gypsum is not recommended for use in amended landscape soils and can interfere with normal plant nutrition. Root stimulators fall in the category of “buyer-beware”. Since they are not regulated by any established authority, there is not enough information to safely state that they do or do not work.

Plant Survival & Growth – Help Your Plants Beat the Stress of Urban Care

Dr. William Johnson, Galveston County Extension Agent spoke of the problems of “killing with kindness” and “too much of a good thing”. In his inimitable style of using humor and interaction with his audience, Dr. Johnson addressed how many gardeners will overdo a good thing...if some water is good perhaps more will be better...if some fertilizer is good perhaps a little more will be better...if some bug spray is good perhaps even more will be better!

Better to restrain ourselves and follow the directions on the container with fertilizers and
Once you chose a tree, what is the best way to plant it?

~ Dig a hole twice as wide as the root ball for “ball and burlap” plants, same size as container for container plants. More importantly make sure the hole is no deeper than the top of the root ball. Planting the tree one to three inches above the level of the surrounding ground is best, since the tree may settle.

~ Place the tree on solid soil. Don’t loosen the soil under the root ball, and don’t add compost, bark or any other amendment or fertilizer. Lift and carry the tree by the root ball, not the trunk.

~ Backfill only with the soil you excavated for the hole.

~ Tamp down the soil around the root ball.

~ Water thoroughly to eliminate air pockets.

~ Use soil to build a 4-inch-tall berm around the edge of the hole. Add a 4- to 6-inch layer of mulch inside the ring, but never cover the root flare.

Post-Planting Tips

The extension service recommends lightly watering the tree every day for a week. The second week, water every other day. The third week, water every third day. The fourth week, water once a week, if needed. Check the soil with a finger to see if it needs watering.

Don’t fertilize the tree after you plant it. Spring is the time for that and even then go light on fertilizer, because fertilizer can burn roots.

Staking the tree is considered a last resort. Some experts believe staking weakens a tree’s ability to thrive on its own once the stakes are removed and also can damage the bark, making it easier for pests to infiltrate.

However, if the trunk is too weak to support itself, use two stakes, on opposite sides of the tree, and remove them after one year.

Source: Texas Cooperative Extension

pest controls and test the soil even if only moving it around to see if more water is really necessary.

I recently read an interesting article written by Elizabeth Head, President of the International Oleander Society. Ms. Head wrote of a very different Galveston Island in the early days of the settlers and the lack of plants and foliage.

Oleanders, palms, banana, catalpa and roses were imported and used extensively across the island in personal beautification projects. After the storm of 1900, the plants were washed away much the same as after Hurricane Ike.

An organization known as the Women’s Health Protective Association took it upon themselves to replant and beautify the island. They sold seeds and plants and held garden shows. Thousands of sycamore trees, cottonwood, elms, oaks, oleanders and palms were planted once again across the island.

Ms. Head wondered “if one day it will be written that we, too, had the will and determination to see it through...it will take a whole city to make our island a green and beautiful place to live”.

I firmly believe that we can do that. Please join us in this gargantuan effort...plant a tree or shrub in memory of those who did this before us.