

Those who attended Al's class on Lawn Weeds should appreciate this item sent in by Bill Gehweiler. Bill gives credit to Anonymous.

LORD KNOWS, THIS MAY BE THE ULTIMATE IN
IDIOCY

"Winterize your lawn", the big sign outside the garden store commanded. I've fed it, mowed it, raked it and watched a lot of it die anyway. Now I'm supposed to winterize it?? I hope it's too late.

Grass lawns have to be the stupidest thing we've come up with outside of thong swimsuits. We constantly battle dandelions, Queen Anne's lace, thistle, violets, chicory and clover that thrive naturally, so we can grow grass that must be nursed through an annual four-step chemical dependency.

Imagine the conversation The Creator might have with St. Francis about this:

"Frank, you know all about gardens and nature. What in the world is going on down there in central Ohio? What happened to the dandelions, violets, thistle and stuff I started eons ago? I had a perfect, no maintenance garden plan. Those plants grow in any type of soil, withstand drought and multiply with abandon. The nectar from the long-lasting blossoms attracted butterflies, honey bees and flocks of songbirds. I expected to see a vast garden of colors by now. But all I see are these green rectangles."

"It's the tribes that settled there, Lord, the Suburbanites. They started calling your flowers "weeds" and went to great extent to kill them and replace them with grass."

"Grass? But it's so boring. It's not colorful. It doesn't attract butterflies, birds and bees, only grubs and sod worms. It's temperamental with temperatures. Do these Suburbanites really want all that grass growing there?"

"Apparently so, Lord. They go to great pains to grow it and keep it green. They begin each Spring by fertilizing grass and poisoning any other plant that crops up in the lawn."

"The Spring rains and cool weather probably make grass grow really fast. That must make the Suburbanites happy."

"Apparently not, Lord. As soon as it grows a little, they cut it - sometimes twice a week."

"They cut it? Do they then bale it like hay?"

"Not exactly, Lord. Most of them rake it up and put it in bags."

"They bag it? Why? Is it a cash crop? Do they sell it?"

"No, sir. Just the opposite. They pay to throw it away."

"Now let me get this straight. They fertilize grass so it will grow. And when it does grow, they cut it off and pay to throw it away?"

"Yes, sir."

"These Suburbanites must be relieved in summer when we cut back on the rain and turn up the heat. That surely slows the growth and saves them a lot of work."

"You aren't gonna believe this, Lord. When the grass stops growing so fast, they drag out hoses and pay more money to water it so they can continue to mow it and pay to get rid of it."

"What nonsense! At least they kept some of the trees. That was a sheer stroke of genius, if I do say so myself. The trees grow leaves in the Spring to provide beauty and shade in the summer. In the Autumn they fall to the ground and form a natural blanket to keep moisture in the soil and protect the trees and bushes. Plus, as they rot, the leaves form compost to enhance the soil. It's a natural circle of life."

"You'd better sit down, Lord. The Suburbanites have drawn a new circle. As soon as the leaves fall, they rake them into great piles and have them hauled away."

"No! What do they do to protect the shrub and tree roots in the winter and keep the soil moist and loose?"

"After throwing away their leaves, they go out and buy something they call mulch, and spread it around in place of the leaves."

"And where do they get this mulch?"

"They cut down trees and grind them up."

"Enough!! I don't want to think about this anymore. Saint Catherine, you're in charge of the arts. What movie have you scheduled for us tonight?"

"Dumb and Dumber", Lord. It's a real stupid movie about...."

"Never mind. I think I just heard the whole story."



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GRASS STORY

Native Plants Perfect for Drought

CONTRIBUTED

North Carolina's abundant, diverse, and colorful native wildflowers will teach us many lessons, if we only listen.

One of those lessons is that plant species differ in their tolerance for prolonged dry conditions. We can observe this when we notice the kinds of habitats where our native plants grow.

For instance, the natural habitat of the Butterfly Milkweed — a beautiful orange wildflower — is dry prairies, fields, and roadsides. Drought-tolerant species presumably evolved in places and soils prone to drought.

Research and experience show that reducing demand for water is the first important step in water conservation.

As local governments announce and enforce water restrictions, we invite gardeners to think and plan for the upcoming spring season with water conservation in mind.

Periods of drought are not uncommon during the growing season in the Piedmont, and could become more frequent and extensive in a period of climate change.

But drought shouldn't keep us out of our gardens! Gardens provide beauty, comfort, and sustenance to people, pollinators, and wildlife. That said, we may find that we need to do things a little differently, adopting sustainable and environmentally friendly practices in gardening, as we

seek to do in other areas of our lives.

We can reduce the water needs of our gardens by using drought-tolerant plants, but we can also adopt the following elements of good garden planning and landscaping:

■ Plant in the spring and fall, giving plants a chance to get established and expand their root systems before the hottest weather and/or drought.

■ Water in the early morning or evening to avoid direct water loss via evaporation and preferably using alternative water sources, as discussed below.

■ Water slowly and by hand or with a soaker hose to avoid water interception by plant surfaces (a lot of water is lost this way when a sprinkler is used). Hand watering allows for closer monitoring of plants and their needs and is a very efficient method of water delivery.

■ Water deeply to encourage deep healthy root systems. When plants are watered shallowly, their roots develop near the soil surface. Since this zone dries out more quickly, these plants will require more frequent watering to maintain their health.

■ Apply mulch to help keep roots cool and moist once plant beds are damp.

■ Seek better sources of water. One alternative is to store and use rainwater in rain barrels around the home.

The North Carolina Botanical

Garden is constructing a new Visitor Education Center and will use large cisterns to grow a garden using only water that falls on the site (this will also reduce impacts of runoff to nearby streams). Some other sources to explore are air conditioner condensation, water from the dehumidifier, water captured while waiting for the shower to warm, or water collected from hand dishwashing.

In view of North Carolina's continued and exceptional drought, the North Carolina Botanical Garden at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill has developed a list of recommended drought-tolerant plants.

Many of these need garden beds that are well-drained in the best of times; they should do well with little rain and minimal watering.

Visit the Web site <http://ncbg.unc.edu> for lists of drought-tolerant species, general recommendations for landscape plants, and recommended sources for native plants.

Gardeners can also learn at this Web site about the Botanical Garden's daily plant sales (March-October), seed catalog, and landscaping/gardening workshops.

Compiled by the staff of the North Carolina Botanical Garden.