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PLANET offers homeowners fall tips to drought-proof landscape

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With drought plaguing much of the country, the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET), the national association of lawn and landscape professionals, says the fall season is the ideal time for homeowners and commercial property owners to assess the condition of their lawns, plants, trees and shrubs to ensure they can weather another dry season.

"The fall season is the best time to assess the landscape, your watering strategy and make any necessary adjustments to safeguard against drought," said Norman Goldenberg, PLANET president. "Homeowners and property owners who assess and renovate their lawn and landscapes in the fall help protect their investment and make the most of the cooler weather and additional moisture that comes along with the fall season."

PLANET members offer advice on several key steps to drought-proof lawns and landscapes this fall: Consider Low-Water Use Plants or Hydrozoning. Consider planting drought-proof (or low-water use) plants or hydrozoning, the practice of clustering plants together with similar water requirements in an effort to conserve water. Plants are typically separated into three water need categories: very low, low, and medium. A Landscape Industry Certified professional can help property owners decide how to transition to this type of planting approach.

Audit and Add Water-Saving Tools. It is recommended to have a land care professional 'audit' your irrigation system or, perhaps, install one. An irrigation system may need repair or adjustment, and a professional can also check for water distribution uniformity and make sure irrigation systems are installed and maintained properly.

Fall or winter is the best time for irrigation system design or repair since land care professionals are often less busy and rates may be more affordable. Also, consider reusing water with rain barrels to retain rainwater for later use in the garden.

Give Grass Some TLC. With cooler weather and more moisture in the fall, growth-and green color-will return to turfgrass. But, use the cooler weather to aerate the lawn by removing small soil plugs out of the lawn. Aeration allows the roots to go deeper into the soil, more absorption of rainfall or irrigation, and the plants to better draw in water, nutrients and oxygen.

And, don't forget to ask your lawn and landscape professional about drought-tolerant turf species that you could overseed in your lawn this fall.

"Turfgrass is incredibly resilient and genetically geared to go dormant in drought conditions and then green up beautifully when the moisture returns," said Bruce Hellerick, PLANET member and senior horticulturist.

Prepare the Soil. Use a professional with the know-how and tools needed to break up and amend the soil. A special tool can be used to loosen or "fracture" soil 12-18" deep so roots penetrate deeper and the application of organic compost or other macro and micro nutrients is well distributed.

"The leading cause of poor landscape performance and drought resilience is improper soil preparation," said Kurt Bland, Landscape Industry Certified, PLANET member. "It's very difficult to rehabilitate a landscape after poor preparation of soil. Before you invest in more plantings this fall, create healthy soil first."

Revisit Your Watering Plan. Check with city ordinances on water restrictions. But, the general recommendation is to water early in the morning when temperatures are cooler. Also, avoid watering on windy days to minimize evaporation. Remember, more damage can be done by overwatering plants.

Together with a certified land care professional, homeowners and property owners can create a drought resistant lawn and landscape through correct plant selection, advanced watering techniques and correct soil preparation with an overall goal of healthy plants and water savings despite summer drought or extreme heat. For more fall planting tips, visit www.landcarenetwork.org/public/consumertips.cfm.

To find a certified landscape professional in your area, visit www.landcarenetwork.org/findaprofessional.

PLANET is an association representing more than 100,000 lawn and landscape professionals in the United States and Canada. PLANET member firms provide a wide range of landscape, lawn care, tree care, irrigation and water management, and interior plantscape services, including consultation, design, installation, and maintenance. PLANET members are dedicated to improving the environment through public service projects and responsible stewardship.

PLANET promotes professionalism in the industry by providing continuing education, legislative advocacy, and administering the professional certification known as Landscape Industry Certified. For more information about PLANET, visit LandcareNetwork.org.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540