

Introducing New Plants To Your Yard and Pond

The Pond Committee is interested in helping homeowners plant their pond edges and banks to help stop erosion and create landscape areas on their property. To that end the committee conducts a plant sale of native varieties of aquatic and bank plants in the spring. Over the past few years, the committee is aware that the number of plants being sold is declining, we are concerned that one of the reasons might be that folks are spending money and time and getting rather poor results. We will set out to give you an understanding of what the major obstacles are that cause poor results and what can be done to increase your collective planting success.

First, let us identify some of the obstacles you face in St James when you design, purchase, and install plantings around your homes.

- The soil here is incredibly bad, it is almost pure sand that happens to be very, very nutrient poor. Ever wonder why so many types of carnivorous plants live in this area. Pitcher plants, Venus Fly traps and Sundews have all figured out a way to feed themselves by using insects as a source of nutrients.

- Rainfall is anything but predictable. Normal rainfall is about 58 inches per year. If we have an average year of rain a large percentage of homeowners trying to plant in their yards will dig a hole only to have it fill partly or completely to the top with water. Whether it fills with water or not, you probably had to break through 8 or so inches of roots just to find that the sand below is very compact and wet. So not only is it nutrient poor but it is also oxygen poor because of the water.
- The combination of high temperatures and high humidity can make new plantings in the summer months very challenging.
- Grazing animals, deer, rabbits and turtles can be a challenge; do what you must to keep your plants safe.

Ok, St James is difficult and can be quite demanding to get stuff to grow. Yes, but it can be done. Much of what we will discuss has been determined by trial and error, mostly error. Many on the committee have been attempting to garden in St James for the last 6-8 years, during that time many lessons have been learned. We will lay out a process for being more successful when getting ready to put new plants in the yard.

The first thing is that you must understand is time and that there are two types of time we want you to get a feel for. One is the time required to get a plant strong enough to compete when planted in the yard, the second is the time of the year you put plants in the ground. Most gardeners have heard the ditty about planting, the first year the plant sleeps, the second year the plant creeps and the third year the plant leaps. In St James we have come to realize that the time required to get a plant to leap is often 4-5 yrs. not 3 yrs. We think this time can be greatly reduced with some patience and a bit of culturing. When the orders are placed at the plant sale in April or May the plants are delivered in June (possibly the most difficult month besides July for new plants). If at this point you can resist the urge to immediately put these plants in the ground, we have a method that should greatly increase your odds of success.

Culturing, another term for potting up, refers to increasing the size of the pot the plant is growing in until the plant is strong and of a size that can compete in the yard. If you pot up your new plants 2 or 3 times during June, July and August increasing the size of the new pot by about an inch each time, you should have much stronger and larger plants. These plants should be grown in good bagged soil (i.e., Sta-green tree and shrub soil or Miracle Grow in ground soil). Stay away from potting soil as this is used to start seeds or transplant seedlings. The tree

and shrub soil normally has a time release fertilizer already in the mix and the soil is sterile (no weed seeds). Also, by controlling the water there is less chance the plants will be heat stressed. The plants will also have time to acclimatize to your yard. Now would be a great time to prepare the planting area for your now stronger and much larger plants. The best time to add plants to the yard is between September 15th and the end of October. The aquatic plants do not need as much potting up nor do they need holes that are much bigger than the roots but they also would benefit from acclimatizing for a few weeks. Aquatic plants will require more attention if the pond level fluctuates a lot during the summer. In addition, the committee has a couple of suggestions for helping your pond plants survive the first month. Lawn staples, available at Bianchi, is an excellent way to ensure that your aquatic plants will stay where you put them. The wind tends to create wavelets which erode the pond edges and disturb the plants. The long staples from Bianchi are preferable to the shorter garden staples available at the garden stores. Sometimes fencing is required to discourage turtles and waterfowl from enjoying the buffet you have just planted. A simple and effective fencing method is available on our website.

The “up the bank” shrubs, perennials or other trees need to be planted with a different approach as much more attention needs to be paid to the size and

quality of the hole you intend to plant them in. The hole for planting should be 2-3 times the size of the root ball and also be 12 inches deeper than the root ball. All the sand that you removed should be set aside. Some folks will work at amending the soil with peat moss and /or a soil conditioner, our choice is to fill the hole with a quality commercial tree and shrub soil and not reuse the existing soil. The plant should be planted slightly higher than the existing grade unless the hole fills with water. If the hole fills with water the new plant should be positioned above the level of the water. If necessary, build a mound, the intent is to keep the roots out of standing water. Plants like to be moist not drowned.

Thank goodness when all this is complete, we can relax and enjoy our new plantings. True enough, at least for a little while because very soon your attention must be directed to maintenance. In general maintenance is a combination of establishing schedules for watering, fertilizing, weeding, deadheading (removing spent flowers) and mulching. The only maintenance item that needs a bit more discussion is fertilizing, due to the nature of the soil in St James, a time release product is recommended; they normally work for 2-4 months depending on rainfall. The Pond Committee realizes that much of what we have shared with you to this point can be debated and we accept that there are other approaches that can be successful. But there is one undeniable,

undebatable and absolute TRUTH and it is that no garden or planting will tend itself. At this point the homeowner must make a decision, either do everything yourself, hire someone to share the work or hire someone to do all the work.

The Pond Committee wants you to be successful. To that end we have attached some references that we have found to be very helpful.

- For aquatic plants--mdc.mo.gov "How to establish aquatic plants in your pond"
- Almost Eden Plants 1240 Smith Rd Merryville, LA 70653 The back of their order sheet that is sent with every order is one of the most comprehensive tools for what and how to establish new plants