

Green Notes

6 WAYS TO REDUCE YOUR GREENWASTE

No matter what type of site you manage, there will always be greenwaste. While it may be impossible to eliminate it, it is possible to reduce the amount produced and the amount that must be taken to the landfill.

1. PLANT RIGHT

The first step to minimizing excess greenwaste is to *prevent* it by using plants appropriate for the space. All too often the mature size of the plant is not taken into consideration when specifying for landscapes. This leads to plantings that need regular pruning to keep them in their designated space along walkways, streets and buildings. If plants are chosen whose mature size fits the space, then only minimal pruning, if any, is needed to keep the plants attractive and in shape.

The mature size of most common landscape plants can be found online or in books like *Sunset Western Garden Book*, *Landscape Plants for California Gardens*, or *Plants and Landscapes for Summer-Dry Climates*, all of which are available online or at garden centers.

2. STOP MAKING MUFFINS

Shrubs and trees all have a natural form built into them. Although weather, soil, and water may play a role in the way a plant eventually looks, most of them do not naturally look like green muffins. Unless the look you or your client wants is a highly structured Japanese garden aesthetic, there is no need to constantly sheer shrubs into cubes and balls. They are much more attractive if left mostly to themselves,



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Sunburned bark due to overpruning

and only minor pruning is done to correct imbalance, damage, or disease. An added benefit for the plant is fewer entry points for pest and disease problems. Trees should be pruned with care according to ISA standards, and no more than is necessary for health and public safety.

3. REDUCE FERTILIZER

Most mature trees and shrubs do not require supplemental fertilization. If you are using a regular fertilizer regimen, you should be able to cut it significantly. Excessive nitrogen causes flushes of tender growth that are then susceptible to pests and extreme weather, and may lead

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Mulching mower blades

to the need for more frequent pruning to keep in bounds. Slower growth is beneficial to you and the plants.

4. REDUCE WATER

Slower growth is beneficial to you and the plants. Sound like I'm repeating myself? The same principle applies here. Provide plants with only the amount of water needed for health. This is often MUCH less than they are given in typical landscape situations. Begin by decreasing irrigation frequency by 20% and monitoring plant appearance. Use a probe or other device to make sure you are irrigating long enough to wet the entire root zone to a depth of 12-18 inches (24" for trees). It may require several short irrigation cycles if the water runs off quickly. Shrubs and trees watered this way grow minimally, stay healthy, and avoid the problems that come with constantly wet soil.

5. GRASSCYCLE

If you work in parks or golf courses, you are already familiar with grasscycling, but if your clientele is private, you may still be collecting grass clippings and disposing of them in the landfill, or putting them in your customers' green cans. Use a sharp mulching mower, and allow clippings to lay; it not only eliminates the greenwaste, but studies show that it reduces the amount of nitrogen fertilizer required, since some is stored in the grass clippings, which will

return it to the soil as they decompose.

To avoid the clumpy look that sometimes results from using a mulching mower on moist lawns, run the mower back over the clumps to chop them finer and redistribute them. Let your customers know you are changing your management method to save them money on fertilizer, and reduce the amount in their green can.

6. CHIP ON SITE: MULCH/ COMPOST

This option may not be available to everyone, but investment in a good chipper-shredder is well-placed. Most tree prunings can be chipped and immediately applied as a top-dressing or mulch to beds and around the base of trees. In the summer, green clippings quickly dry and take on a uniform color that blends in to other mulches.

If the appearance is unacceptable, use it under shrubs or in out of the way spots not readily visible, or compost it out of sight to be used as a green soil amendment. **For more information on these topics, visit our website:**

[**SJ Co. Environmental Hort.**](#)

GROUNDCOVERS FOR UNDER TREES

These are all shade tolerant

- *Baccharis pilularis*- 'Pigeon Point' coyote brush
- *Trachelospermum jasminoides*- star jasmine
- *Carex divulsa*, *C. pansa*, *C. praegracilis*- Berkeley sedge, CA meadow sedge, western meadow sedge
- Fine leaf no-mow fescues
- *Potentilla neumanniana*- spring cinquefoil

These can be used like groundcovers

- *Helleborus* - hybrid/ species Lenten roses
- *Heuchera maxima*- island alum root
- *Heuchera* hybrids- coral bells

TREES IN TURF

Trees in turf require specific management strategies if they are to have a long, healthy life in the landscape. Following are the primary problems and how to avoid them.

ROOT and TRUNK DAMAGE

Maintenance equipment and practices are responsible for most of the damage on trees in turf. If lawn is grown right next to a tree, the bark is frequently nicked by the mower or whacked by the string trimmer. In spring when plants are actively growing, these injuries can be especially devastating to the tree's ability to carry water and nutrients up to the crown.

If small circles of bare earth are maintained around trunks with a string trimmer as pictured to the right, surface roots are exposed over time and subject to continual nicking. This can kill these roots, or at the very least make an entry point for disease organisms.

ANSWER:

The best solution is to maintain a turf free mulch zone around the base of the tree as wide as the drip line of the crown. Studies have shown that this practice increases soil health, retains soil moisture, increases tree roots, and



Mulch zone protects oak on golf course



Roots exposed/scalped by string trimmer

results in larger diameter trunks. Be sure to maintain the mulch a few inches from the trunk base and at a depth of around 2-3 inches.

An alternate, but less ideal option is to plant a low water use groundcover in the root zone. See the box at the bottom of Page 2 for some suggestions.

MISMATCHED IRRIGATION

The regular summer irrigation to a depth of 6-12 inches required by turf does not match the needs of trees - even newly planted trees, which should be watered to a depth of 18 inches and allowed to dry down between irrigations. Trees watered frequently and shallowly develop shallow and surface roots which make the tree susceptible to windfall and ruin the appearance of the lawn in which they are planted. The surface roots also complicate maintenance for the mowing crew, and mower injuries open these roots up to disease.

ANSWER:

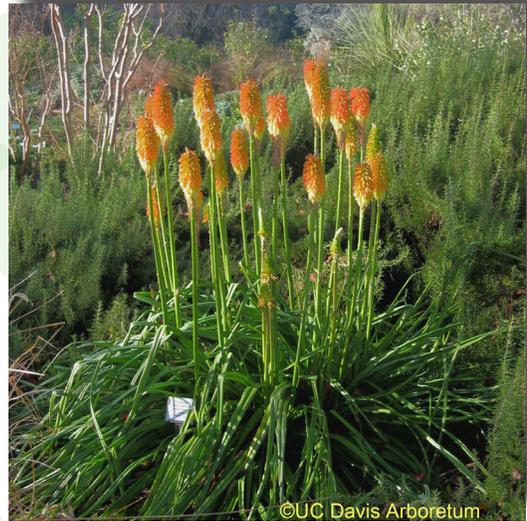
Where possible, add bubblers or subsurface drip to tree zones, and put them on a separate valve that will allow monthly deep watering. If using low water groundcovers, subsurface drip or low-flow sprays or rotors will allow you to deliver water to the depth required by both trees and groundcovers. If retrofitting is not possible, make every effort to provide trees with a deep monthly irrigation in the entire root zone to promote deeper rooting.

PLANT THIS

Kniphofia 'Christmas Cheer'

When winter days are gray and dreary 'Christmas Cheer' is a bright spot of color. This water-conserving poker plant variety raises its bright orange blooms in the winter unlike its summer blooming relatives.

Good companions are prostrate rosemary or a blanket of *Nepeta x faasennii* 'Walker's Low', but it makes a bold accent plant all on its own. This can be seen blooming in the Demo Garden at the Robert J. Cabral Agricultural Center at the corner of South B St. and E. Earhart Ave. in Stockton, one block south of Arch-Airport Rd.



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