

The Village Gazette



Volume 10, Issue 5
Village Creek Community Association

May 2013

Village Creek Yard of the Month April 2013 12638 Willow Breeze

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The Village Gazette

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LANDSCAPE CORNER

By Gordon Watson

Our rainfall totals (as of this writing) are not encouraging. Village Creek's landscaper has planted hundreds of new plants and trees around Village Creek including some that may be near your property line. While normal rainfall would take care of these young plants, in the absence of rain, they will rely on irrigation. Anything you can do to assure these young plants get water will be greatly appreciated.

This month, fertilize annual flowers with ½ pound of ammonium sulfate per 100 square feet of planting.

Mulch, mulch, mulch to keep weeds down, conserve water.

Remove the dead Crape myrtle flowers to force more flower growth.

Fruit trees need lots of water now. Keep in mind that we typically get 5.5" of rain in May. This would be one good storm per week. If this doesn't happen, you will need to make up the deficit with irrigation. Vegetables: Heat tolerant vegetables can

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Landscape Corner- (Continued from Page 2)

be planted now. Among these are sweet potatoes, pumpkins, squashes, and southern peas.

Perennials & Annuals: Fertilize this month and keep 4" of mulch around the drip line (but keep mulch away from the trunk). Upper horizontal root-tops should almost show.

Evergreen hedges (from TGM) should be pruned this month to increase density. Prune the tops narrower than the bottoms. This will allow more light to the bottom of the plant to keep the lower foliage strong.

Lawns: If you haven't applied spring fertilizer, do so now (1 pound of ammonium sulfate per 1000 square feet will do). Water this in thoroughly or you will burn the lawn.

Here is an interesting Texas Gardener Magazine theory: "Older tree and shrubs need not be fertilized at all. The goal of fertilizing is to speed a young plant along toward an acceptable size, so additional feeding is not needed, and, in fact, can result in more pruning work."

A very useful web site is Texas A&M's site: <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu>. An example of one of the site's features is their plant selection program. A&M's Plant Selector will select a plant for you based on your zip code, exposure to sun,

flower color, bloom period, whether you want a perennial, etc. For example, I want a tree next to our driveway. I put in the required information, and the results quickly pop up. There are four trees which were rated with a "10" which is Earthkind's top rating. This wonderful program is not limited to trees, but includes almost any plant you can think of. Once you have found the recommended plants, you can click on specific ones to see more information. Even with this useful tool, you may want to look at other sources to find out more. For example, excluded from the information provided for the tree I like is such issues as, "How close can I plant this tree next to a driveway without having any driveway/root problems? Does this tree drop sap?"

This is the Plant Selector web address:

<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/earthkind/plantselector/search.php?zipcode=77377>

We can expect the average temperature in May to be about 85, so we are definitely into the watering season. I hope it rains, but, if it doesn't, you need to add some water this month. The best way to determine if you need water is to step on a sharp shovel or some other sharp tool to see how far it is easy to insert.

(Continued on Page 4)

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Pending Listings	6	\$220,300	\$77.69	
Sold Since 12/1/12	7	\$210,000	\$77.50	

Statistics are averages compiled from Houston Association of Realtors MLS. 3/5/13

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Landscape Corner- (Continued from Page 3)

If you cannot insert it 4" to 6" easily, you probably need to water. Needless to say, if the lawn appears to need water, it probably does. Remember that our lawns, during summer, require between 0.75 and 1.00 inches per week. This must come from either rain or irrigation. If you think about it, the average yearly rainfall for our area is about 50", so about an inch a week of either rain or irrigation is intuitively correct.

Trees throughout Texas are suffering, and those on Village Creek are as well. Again, referring to Texas A&M's Earthkind files, Doug Welsh : (<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/earthkind/files/2010/10/tree-shrub-irrigation-drought.pdf>), suggests that watering trees with a lawn irrigation system will not be sufficient

for trees. If you just apply an inch with your lawn irrigation system, much of that water is going to be utilized by the lawn before it has a chance to get to the tree roots.

Marty Baker, a retired Texas Agrilife extension service horticulturist, recommends applying water to trees in a donut fashion starting at about 5 feet out from the trunk and extending 5 feet beyond the most remote limbs (drip line). T&M's rule of thumb during a drought is to give small, one-year-old trees 28 gallons of water a week, two-year-olds 56 gallons a week, and three-year-olds 112 gallons. The best way to do this watering is a soaker hose.

Until next time, Happy Gardening!

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Village Creek

HOME HANDYMAN HINTS

MAY 2013

Gordon R. Watson

TOILETS

We recently bought two new toilets for our home. The old ones had manufacturing defects which caused the lids to be crooked, and one of them didn't seem to flush well. Although the reason for the toilet change was not to save water, I did learn a lot about toilets and water conservation. The table below shows how water-efficiency (from the EPA) has improved over the years.

Year of Mfr	Gals/flush
pre-1982	5-7
1982-1990	3.5
1990-1994	1.6-3.5
	1.6
WaterSense	1.28

Early efforts to reduce toilet water usage were not very successful; however, according to the EPA, the new units flush as well as, and often, better than the older models...even with less water. The toilets we replaced were 1.6 gal/flush (gpf) units, and it is likely that all of the toilets in Village Creek are 1.6 gpf (or better). To check your gpf, look either behind the seat or inside of the tank on the back wall. Our new toilets are 1.6 gpf. We didn't consider the new EPA recommended WaterSense 1.28 gpf units because we, honestly,

didn't know about them. Further, in retrospect, we would probably still have chosen the 1.6 gpf simply because they are less expensive. Furthermore, research indicates that the payback between 1.6 and 1.28 gpf is not very significant.

When the U.S.A is looked at in its entirety, according to the EPA (<http://www.epa.gov/WaterSense/products/toilets.html>), their new standard of 1.28 gpf (which apparently is not yet law) has the potential to save each American family more than \$110 per year or \$2,200 over the life of older toilets (pre-1990 or so). This number is probably based on just one or two toilets in the home and a family of four. You can calculate more meaningful savings based on your own situation. Our water (which includes water, sewer, and some other taxes) costs \$9.08/1000 gallons or about \$.0091/gallon. At 1.6 gpf, this would mean that it costs a family of four, with each person flushing five times/day, about \$106 per year. Given that we have fairly efficient toilets, it probably would not be a good investment (for most families) to buy a 1.28 gpf WaterSense toilet just as an investment. On the other hand, if you have a very large family, and one toilet gets most of the flushes, then such an investment might be worthwhile. Of course, if you know someone in an older home, a new 1.28 or 1.6 gpf toilet would likely quickly pay for itself. And, if you are considering replacing a 1.6 gpf toilet for a reason other than water conservation, you should at least think about getting a WaterSense unit.

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Home Hints- (Continued from Page 7)

We decided to buy two American Standard Champion 4's 1.6 gpf units because this model was highly rated by a consumer magazine and only cost about \$200 each. One of the labels on the boxes says something like, "Can flush 16 golf balls at one time." I suppose that would be handy for someone trying to get rid of lots of golf balls in some sort of TV mystery series. The box also indicates that "No tools are required." I suppose the no-tool deal applies to some people, but I wasn't that lucky. Both of our toilet installations had issues which resulted in my having to pull out quite a few tools.

The previous toilets were pretty much glued to the floor with a sealant between the toilet and the floor. Removing this required a hammer and a paint scraper... just to get the toilets loose. I simply hit the paint scraper with a hammer and made my way around the water closet (constantly wondering if I was going to break the tile floor). There is probably a better way to do that job. The next problem was that the "rough in dimension required" was 12". This is the distance from the wall to the center of the flange drain. Almost all toilets have this standard dimension. Exceptions would be older toilets or special toilets.

Anyway, to make another short story long, probably because of builder's error, the rough-in dimension available on the master bedroom toilet was only 11". While this problem didn't matter

with the old toilet, it did with the new one. I had to chisel/sand the baseboard away just a bit to make it fit. Another problem was also related to a builder's error. The flange below the toilet was just a bit too high off of the concrete, so the toilet wouldn't sit level. I had to shim it to make it sit without wobbling. All of these problems make for an interesting day, but I was able to solve them, and both toilets work really well. I rarely get through a project without some blips of one sort or another.

"Nationally, (according to the EPA) if all old, inefficient toilets in the United States were replaced with WaterSense models, we could save 520 billion gallons of water per year, or the amount of water that flows over Niagara Falls in about 12 days." I can imagine that lack of flow during those two weeks would disappoint a lot of tourists.

If you have a 1.6 gpf toilet, and it works fine, you probably will never need to worry about the following hints. If you do want to or need to change a toilet, here are some things to consider/do:

Buy toilets that comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This is important to every one of us because the ADA-compliant toilets are tall enough (17" to 19" from floor to top of seat) that they are easier for older adults to use...something that most of us will face eventually. Furthermore, younger people won't

(Continued on Page 9)



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Home Hints- (Continued from Page 8)

generally notice the height difference. The new models do not have a “clunky” design like taller ones used to.

The 1.6 gpf is the current EPA requirement, but consider the 1.28 gal/flush WaterSense toilet. Water will most likely be getting even more expensive than it already is.

Use braided stainless steel water supply line (not plastic line... which will be more likely to break).

A sealant between the toilet bowl and the floor may be needed if the floor is not level, and you need to shim it. The sealant will help keep the shims in place, and if the gap is large, it will keep dirt and water (from mopping) from getting underneath. Although they are needed sometimes, I don't like sealants because, they have the potential to hide leaks under the toilet, and the adhesive effect of the sealant can be a real challenge to remove when you need to repair or replace the toilet. Make sure the toilet doesn't wobble and is level. Sealant may help with this issue AFTER the shims are tightly in place. After the installation, consider putting a water detector (Zircon is one example) on the floor in back of the toilet.

Don't over-tighten bolts on the toilet bowl. These bolts do not create a water-tight seal...they just keep the toilet physically in place and most of the work is done by gravity. If you over-tighten the two bowl nuts, you may crack the bowl...not a good thing. It would be a

day-wrecker (which is not a tow truck that operates only during the day). Tightening them a bit more than finger-tight is fine. American Standard includes a neat tool which makes this job easy.

Do not over-tighten the water connection line. A bit more than hand-tight is fine. Don't be like me: ***Read the instructions!***

Note that many new plastic seat lids that come with some new toilets are not as sturdy as in the past. Honestly, you cannot sit on ours because it is so flimsy. Certainly the days when you can stand on our toilet seats are over. If this is a problem, you may need to buy different toilet seat, or maybe other toilets come with sturdier lids.

To check for water line leaks, I dry my finger off, and touch under each of the water connections. Any leaks will show up as a glisten on your finger. As a final check, I commonly leave a paper towel under all plumbing connections for a few days. The slightest drips will show up on the towel.

Go to hardware store websites or YouTube for additional hints.

By the way, the flushing action of our new toilets takes some getting used to. While a normal flush takes five seconds or so, these new units have massive tank outlets, so the entire flush is over within a second or two. I guess this rapid flushing action is what makes them work so well.

Until next time, **take care of your home, and it will take care of you!**

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The goal is to fill in the grid so that every row, every column, and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 through 9. Each digit may appear only once in each row, each column, and each 3x3 box.

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The Village Gazette

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