

Landscaping For Home Security

A recent article by Kim Powell, N.C. State University landscape specialist, really peaked my interest in landscaping for maximum home security. Few of us consider the effect our landscape will have on our home security when we are planning or planting. I have taken some of Mr. Powell's suggestions and incorporated some of my own for a little different perspective on landscaping.

Visibility should be considered when planting trees and shrubs around the home. Rising urban crime is tough to fight if you cannot see the villain. Good visibility is important for function and the aesthetic value of a pleasant view.

Just as you would consider the size potential, growth habits, color, flowering, and maintenance, also think how the plants, or their absence, can help protect the home. The following are some tips to make your landscape less friendly to villains and more secure for you.

Eliminate the danger zones. Planting trees and shrubs around the house is an integral part of the total landscape process, but consider the consequences before you plant.

Foundation plantings are usually planted far enough away from the house so there is a "dead air" space. This dead air space can help decrease energy consumption by insulating and protecting the foundation from severe daily changes in temperature.

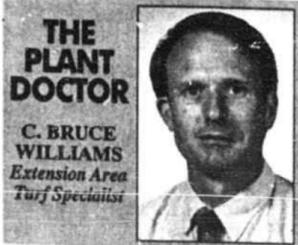
At the same time that we have saved energy, we have also created a hiding place for an intruder or "Peeping Tom." Consider planting dwarf shrubs under windows or next to doors to eliminate this potential danger zone. Request Horticulture Information Leaflet 634, "Shrubs 1-4 Feet For North Carolina Landscapes" from your county North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service office.

Another way to address this problem (don't go and remove all the 6-foot-tall evergreens yet) is to create a tree-form plant. If the shrub is in a good location and has the potential of having an interesting shape, remove the lower limbs and thin out 50 percent of the inside of the plant. Ligustrum, Photinia, Chinese Holly, Burford Holly, and Wax Myrtle are good choices for converting to tree form.

Defensive Plants: Plants have numerous landscape characteristics that are often admired—color, form, shape and texture. Texture can also be used to describe plants with thorns, spines or needles. These plants offer an additional landscape component—protection! Whenever an impenetrable barrier is wanted, or a vulnerable place needs protection, use a "defensive" plant.

Plants with thorns or a very dense growth habit fit this category. Examples are: Pyracantha, Chinese Holly, Roses, Mahonia, Barberry, Yucca, Elaeagnus, Cedar or Junipers. One of the best plants for this landscape function is the Hardy Orange (*Poncirus trifoliata*). Hardy Orange grows 10 to 20 feet tall and prefers acid, well-drained soils. The 2-to-4-inch-long spines helps create an excellent security fence.

I once had an individual tell me that the CIA used this plant in several of their "secret" installations in



THE PLANT DOCTOR
C. BRUCE WILLIAMS
Extension Area
Turf Specialist

military installations. Any structure with this plant around can stay secret as far as I am concerned. Be careful with this plant, it is truly a landscape hazard.

In summary:
1. Remove the danger zones around the house, especially at entrances and in front of windows. This would include overgrown trees and shrubs. Prune large plants into tree-form as an alternative to topping or removal.

2. Incorporate dwarf shrubs or possibly "defensive" plants next to windows and in foundation plantings.

3. Create a security fence around the boundary lines. This will also serve as a landscape screen.

4. Incorporate landscape lighting with timers into the landscape.

5. Review a publication on landscaping, such as N.C. Cooperative Extension publication "Residential Landscaping AG-248," and really consider security in your plans.

Send your gardening questions and comments to the Plant Doctor, P.O. Box 109, Bolivia NC 28422. Send a SASE for a reply or when requesting publications.

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