

Landscaping

Take Down That Tree!

By Elin Doehne, Past President, AZ Federation of GCs WACONIAH August 2007

“Take down that tree” was the cry! And so we did. It all happened at the end of a day-long Landscape Design Workshop sponsored by the Arizona federation of Garden Clubs (AFGC). Twenty-four AFGC members met at the second of the spring workshops held on actual sites rather than in the classroom. This particular site posed the problem of two years of maintenance-neglect and need for a quick fix-up because the owner wished to sell the property.

This problem was: How to make it attractive and market-ready in the shortest possible time and at the lowest reasonable cost? Cindy Odgers, Head of Technology and Agriculture at Mesa Community College, was the Landscape Design Instructor and walked the class through the design shortcomings and strong points of the property and how to enhance those strong points. Ellen Abelein of Sedona Yard Care carried out the actual suggested maintenance and installation operations on the spot. Because the property lacked mid-height plants, shrubs were available for planting and were placed to minimize existing design defects and to provide privacy screening. Odgers gave some basic tips for quick improvement:

Follow the uneven rule – plant in uneven numbers of the same species for best effect.

Make curbside utility installations disappear – paint pipes, culverts, and meter covers black.

This had been done on this site earlier at her suggestion and so it was clear how effective this simple change was.

Prune shrubs and trees so they do not conceal the front door – Odgers gave a pruning demonstration on an overgrown and badly pruned oleander along with information on care of pruning equipment. Many said this was one of the most valuable pruning demonstrations they had ever had.

Create vignettes to give focus to various areas of the yard - for this property, she suggested a simple gravel path to carry the visitor up into the natural area to a bench set apart from the more cultivated area.

Expose vistas and install plants to direct the eye to those vistas – this led to the felling (via chain saw) of the volunteer juniper that was obscuring a view of Sedona’s famous red rocks. Some students were loathe to cut down any tree, but the vote was 21 to 3 to take down the tree, so down it came!

The students were unanimous in saying that they wished they’d had these workshops before they’d landscaped their own yards. The first workshop had been to Cindy Odgers newly landscaped home where she had clear illustrations of design principles in action. In both workshops, the students toured the neighborhoods and analyzed other properties learning the shortcoming and successes of each of the landscape designs. It was a practical, hands-on course, with design principles clearly illustrated and implemented. I recommend that other garden clubs try it if they have difficulty in arousing enthusiasm for a more structured design class, which was the case here in Arizona.