

"FALL PLANTING"

Running now through December

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Freelance writer

"Think spring" isn't the only phrase to remember when you're interested in landscaping your property. Another is "think fall."

There are many advantages for planting trees and shrubs in the fall, according to Edward Eaton and Robert (Bob) Brand, co-owners of Eaton Nursery Limited in West Bloomfield.

"Less maintenance is required with fall plantings. Very little watering is needed unless there is an extremely bone-dry fall. Also, people don't have to be as concerned with pruning because the plants are dormant," explained Eaton.

Brand added that since root growth is especially active in the fall, planting then instead of the next spring gives plants a stronger hold on their new environment and better start the next spring.

Fall planting also offers an advantage to the customer. Landscape contractors generally aren't as busy during the months of September through December.

"It only takes us about two weeks to work up a plan for a customer and complete the planting. That's a lot faster than the three to four weeks it takes during the warmer months when we're sometimes swamped with landscaping jobs," said Brand, who's been in the nursery business for 13 years. Eaton has 23 years experience.

Everything except groundcover can be planted until the ground freezes, which usually is after Thanksgiving, stated the two Michigan State University graduates. Each received a horticulture degree.

"We can plant 90 percent of our stock late into the year," Eaton said.

Ninety percent means a choice of hundreds of varieties of trees and shrubs at Eaton Nursery. The nursery is situated on five acres at 5899 West Maple Road. It looks more like a park than a typical plant shop.

"We literally have people come here and browse for hours just to see the different types of trees and shrubs we have," said Brand, a Birmingham resident. "We specialize in uncommon items."

They also come to view the unique Christmas items that are displayed all year long. Eaton, who lives in Franklin, and his partner strive to maintain quality plants at their nursery. Brand said, "It's hard for us to give price quotes over the phone because there's no way to compare a 10-foot-tall maple tree that's three inches in diameter with another 10-foot-tall maple tree that's only one inch around that another nursery has advertised."

"Customers need to learn to shop for trees according to the thickness of the trunk and the fullness of the branches instead of by the lowest price," he explained.

You can't shop for quality plants over the phone. You have to go to a nursery and see them.

Eaton Nursery maintains its enormous inventory of plants throughout the year in order to support its landscaping business.

"Landscaping is our main business," admitted Eaton. "We keep a large inventory so we know we have the best selection available for our customers."

Eaton and Brand plan and execute landscaping jobs for homeowners anywhere in the Detroit metropolitan area.

The way they go about a landscaping job is first to meet with the homeowner and see the house.

"This helps us learn what our customer's tastes are. We always design a plan according to the style of the house and the individual taste of the customer," Brand said.

Once the design and itemized price list is completed, the homeowner comes to Eaton Nursery to personally select the recommended trees and shrubs.

"That way they see what they are getting before we put the plants in the ground. They can choose something else if they don't like what we suggested," he added.

Only 50 percent of the nursery's customers completely follow through with the landscaping design. Most do it in phases.

But at least when they are done, there is a continuity to the look, even if it took three years to complete, according to Eaton.

Eaton Nursery is closed January and February. Eaton and Brand don't leave town for a two-month vacation period.

They spend as many hours as they can lecturing for garden clubs and other groups, as well as designing plans for spring planting.

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