

Spring Home & Garden  
**WAUKESHA**  
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Special Edition

# HOME



Your Guide to Homes, Home Improvement, Lawn & Garden and MORE!

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## After the flood



MICHAEL  
TIMM

After last year's flooding spring and early summer rains, many gardeners are wondering how their plants may have fared. What does flooding do to the landscape in general? What about the soil, how is it affected? Will my perennials survive? What kind of damage did my trees and shrubs incur, and what signs should we be looking for that would indicate injury?

The first thing to consider is the duration of the flood. Most plants will survive a short flood. Once we get past two days though, plants will start to have issues. Once we hit 5-7 days, most plants will suffer some damage. The main affect floods have on plants is the depletion of oxygen from the soil. During flooding, water replaces air in the soil, leaving roots oxygen deprived, meaning they can no longer perform their basic duties. The presence of excess water for long durations also increases the chance of root rot, also injuring roots and not allowing them to perform efficiently. The

injury, and subsequent loss, of roots means that even after the flood recedes, there may be less of a root structure available to support the existing plant. Because of this, some damage will be seen instantly, but other problems may not pop up until later. This is especially true for trees and shrubs.

Flooding can also change your soil; Soil compaction is one issue. The pounding rain, and the weight of the water itself, can compress the soil. This also decreases the amount of open pore space in the soil, therefore depleting the amount of available oxygen for the roots. Also, as the waters recede, sediment can also fill the open spaces. It would probably be a good idea to aerate your turf areas, and cultivate existing ornamental beds, to loosen soil and improve oxygen levels.

Another soil issue is the loss of beneficial microorganisms due to lack of oxygen. A living soil is filled with many living organisms. These play a large role in making a healthy ecosystem. Besides aeration of flooded areas, you may want to think about adding some compost. This will help in the re-introduction of beneficial living organisms, compaction, and will also replenish nutrients lost to leaching.

Plant survival, after flooding, is going to depend again on the duration of the flood, and the overall health and age of the plant. Some plants simply handle flooding better than others. Take perennials for instance. Those perennials that like wet feet (Cardinal Flower, Astilbe, etc.) are probably going to be fine,



but those that like it drier (Coreopsis, Lavender, Asters, etc.) will most likely suffer. Established plants will also have a better chance than anything newly planted.

The damage to trees and shrubs might be less obvious at first. Plants like these, with larger root systems, don't normally show immediate damage, although possible. It depends on the extent of the root damage. Again, varieties that love moisture will fare better than those that don't to a point. Signs to watch for as the summer progresses, and in subsequent years, include yellowing/browning of foliage, wilting, premature fall color, Twig or branch dieback, and general decline in health.

I guess if gardening teaches us anything, it's how to deal with adversity. Happy Gardening!

(Michael Timm is chief horticulturalist for Ebert's Greenhouse Village in Ixonia.)

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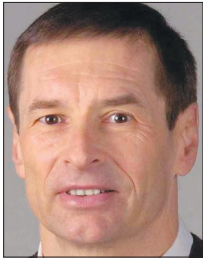
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# Standby emergency generators



JAMES  
DULLEY

**Dear Jim: I plan to install a backup generator for power outages. How do I determine what size I need? Would it make economic sense to just use one all the time? - Pascal H.**

**Dear Pascal:** maller portable or large whole-house emergency backup generators are becoming more popular because most home activities now require electricity. Power outages are not from just storms or accidents. During the summertime with high air-conditioning loads, there sometimes are brownouts from lack of generation capacity.

The cost to operate your own generator continuously would be more than your current electric rate, even when running it on relatively inexpensive natural gas. Since one typically runs for a relatively short

time during power outages, the operating cost is not significant. Running one continuously would also wear it out because it is not designed for that and there are maintenance costs.

When selecting a backup generator, determine what you want to keep running during an outage. This impacts how large (output capacity) a unit you need. Having enough power for cooking, refrigeration, lighting, television, and operating a furnace blower are typical essential needs.

Electricity output from a generator is rated in KW (kilowatts). For a typical family of four, a 12-KW backup generator is adequate to power almost everything. By doing without some appliances and not trying to do use many simultaneously, a smaller, less expensive a 5- to 7- KW should keep essential appliances running.

To properly size your generator, make a list of the electric items you want to keep running. Check the wattage on the nameplate of each one. This is called the total "running wattage". Appliances with electric motors are inductive devices so they require additional surge "startup wattage" briefly at startup. This can be as much as three times the running wattage.

A sizing rule of thumb is to total the running wattages for the appliances you need to keep running. Add the additional startup



Photo credit Kohler

**This is a whole-house sized standby generator being installed at a home. Notice the small gas engine inside the housing.**

wattage for the largest appliance to get the rated power for a generator. The theory is all appliances will likely not start at the same time.

For example, the running/startup wattages respectively for several essential items are: refrigerator - 200/1200, several lights - 200/0, furnace blower - 800/2300, sump pump - 800/1300, and television - 100/0. The required size of a generator would be  $200+200+800+800+100+2300=4700$  watts.

The "rated power" output of any genera-

tor, from small portable to fixed whole-house, is the amount of wattage it can produce continually. The "maximum rated power" is the amount it can produce for a maximum of 30 minutes or so. Running at maximum output longer can damage the generator.

If you select a whole-house generator which is attached to the breaker panel, definitely install an ATS (automatic transfer switch) with it. This is more convenient for you and safe for the utility company repair workers. When the ATS senses a power outage or brownout (low voltage), it disconnects your house from the electric grid and starts the generator.

Another advantage of having an ATS is it starts and runs the generator periodically just to make sure everything is functioning properly for when it is actually needed. This is called exercising the system.

Natural gas is the least expensive and cleanest fuel to power a backup generator. The small engine requires very little maintenance. Propane is also clean burning, but it is considerably more expensive than natural gas and requires a storage tank.

A diesel-powered generator requires more maintenance and a storage tank. A big advantage is if the electricity outage is very long, you can easily dump more diesel fuel into the tank to keep it running. A drawback is diesel fuel has a limited useful life.

If you want to just keep a light and TV running and food from spoiling in the refrigerator, get an uninterruptible power supply (UPS) for a computer. Use it for your computer too. Select one which has a maximum wattage greater than your refrigerator (200 watts for a new Energy Star one up to 400 watts for an old one).

It will power the refrigerator for a while before its battery runs down. Also get an emergency car battery power pack. Most have a 115-volt inverter and outlet, but may not be powerful enough for the refrigerator. Plug the UPS into car battery pack to recharge the UPS. The car battery pack can be recharged from your car battery system.

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**Dear Jim:** I have a crawl space underneath my house. The floor above it is insulated. There are outdoor vents in the crawl space, but there is still mold on the underside of the floor lumber. Why? – Amethyst G.

**Dear Amethyst:** Venting your crawl space was a good idea, but only a partial solution. You also should lay 6-mil thick plastic vapor barrier over the ground and up the crawl space walls to the top. This blocks the moisture.

To kill the mold on the joists, mix one-half to three-quarters cup of bleach to a gallon of water. Spray it on the joists. Wear safety goggles and protective clothing.

Send inquiries to James Dulley, Newspaper Name, 6906 Royalgreen Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45244 or visit [www.dulley.com](http://www.dulley.com).

## How to establish a peaceful backyard retreat

**METRO** — Backyards have undergone quite a transformation over the last decade-plus. The days when patios and decks were all a backyard living space had to offer are largely a thing of the past, as homeowners have realized just how valuable it can be to commit to a stunning backyard.

The real estate experts at Zillow estimate that homes with backyard features such as outdoor televisions, outdoor showers and outdoor kitchens command 3.1 percent more than expected upon reaching the market. If 3.1 percent doesn't sound like a lot, it actually equates to nearly \$11,000 on a typical home. But there's more to gain than money when converting a backyard space into a relaxing respite. Such spaces can provide a welcoming escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life, all the while giving homeowners and residents a comfortable space to soak in the great outdoors. With that in mind, homeowners can take the following steps to establish a peaceful backyard retreat.

■ **Refresh the landscape.** Even if your vision is centered on outdoor furniture and a space that accommodates movie nights under the stars, it's still best to refresh the existing landscape if it needs a little upkeep. Overgrown trees, hedges and bush-



es can create the same cluttered vibe that dominates interior spaces overrun with items. If necessary, work with a local tree service or landscape architect to trim, or even remove, trees and hedges that are crowding the backyard and making it feel claustrophobic. Aim for a landscape that affords a balance of sun and shade so the space is as comfortable as possible throughout the day.

■ **Set up multiple gathering spaces.** Once a backyard retreat is established, everyone who calls the property home might find the space hard to resist. Keep this in mind when planning the space and aim to set up multiple gathering spaces. An outdoor kitchen with a nearby dinner table can be a great space to enjoy al fresco dining, but a separate area to read a book or watch a movie or ballgame can make the space more versatile. Multiple gathering spaces ensures there's always a peaceful spot to unwind out back.

■ **Add a water feature.** Running water has a way of calming the nerves, and that's good to keep in mind when planning a backyard retreat. Water features run the gamut from garden ponds to koi ponds to fountains to hot tubs. Homeowners can identify which feature best aligns with their idea of relaxation and then work with a landscape architect to ensure it's installed in their backyard oasis.

■ **Don't forget shade.** Temperatures are rising in many areas of the globe, and that's worth noting when planning a backyard retreat. Even the most ardent sun worshippers likely won't want to be exposed to the sun at all times when relaxing in their backyards. Strategically chosen means of providing shade can make spaces enjoyable all day long. Consider umbrellas, gazebos, pergolas, and even retractable awnings to cover patios and decks when the sun is at its highest each afternoon. If you plan to spend ample time in the grass, make that more enjoyable by planting shade trees, which also can protect the grass from drought and make it more comfortable underfoot.

A relaxing backyard retreat can make for an ideal space to escape the hustle and bustle of daily life.

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# Gifts for the gardener



**MICHAEL  
TIMM**

For all the years I've been a gardener, there are only a handful of times I have actually received something gardening related as a gift. We need to think about buying gifts for our gardening family and friends.

There are the basic tools of course. Although this doesn't mean you have to buy them a shovel or rake, but who knows, they may need one. But there are things like new styles of pruners, and other hand tools with eco-designs that might peak your interest. These little hand tools are used more often than the larger ones in the garden, especially with raised bed gardening becoming so popular. Watering wands are

another handy tool for all gardeners to possess. They come in many colors, shapes and sizes. For those who still use watering cans, boy have they changed as well.

Life circumstances may also change, and there is no reason gardening can't change with it. Many people are moving out of their homes and into condos or apartments and they still want to garden. Many are switching to container gardening for their patio or balcony. Because of this, I usually start in the container section. I usually try to find some fun, different, or interesting things that fit a particular person's interest. Something they may not buy for themselves because it's more of a want than a need. There are some really interesting container selections these days besides the basic plastic and terra cotta choices. From new colors and designs to more of a natural look, you can find it all. Let's not forget the houseplants, they make great gifts. Brighten someone's day.

Garden art is not only fun to shop for, but it's a huge trend these days. People are putting more than just plants in their garden beds. Spinners, colored glass sculptures, stepping stones, metal sculptures, statuary of just about anything you can imagine,



signs, fountains, and so much more. Also check out the thrift stores, garage sales, and auctions for old gardening tools or other antiques, these are also very popular.

If someone is more into nature; bird houses and feeders, bird baths, bat houses, butterfly houses and drinking and bathing stations, bee houses, toad houses, harvest baskets, straw hats, a nice wooden potting bench and of course books.

If you're at a loss when shopping and don't know what they might actually need

or want, there are always gift cards. Everyone loves gift cards!

So next time you're out shopping at the garden center, keep your eyes peeled for those special gifts for family and friends that love to garden. There is nothing that warms a gardener's heart more than getting a special gift for the garden. Happy Gardening!

*(Michael Timm is chief horticulturalist for Ebert's Greenhouse Village in Ixonia.)*

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## Convenient/water-saving toilets



**JAMES  
DULLEY**

Dear Jim: The old toilets in our master bedroom and half-bath guest bathrooms don't flush well. What are our options for new water-saving toilets for each of the bathrooms? - Lauren W.

**Dear Lauren:** Even though you can likely fix your old toilet yourself with a repair kit, you would be better off in the long run installing a new water-saving model. The flushing of toilets typically accounts for 30 percent of the water usage for a family making it, by far, the greatest single water usage appliance.

Depending upon how old your master bathroom toilet is, it may use either 3.5 or 5.0 gpf (gallons of water per flush). The average family can save up to \$100 per year in water costs by installing water-saving toilets. I recently replaced an old toilet with a 1.6 gpf toilet which cost less than \$60 at Home Depot. This can provide a payback in less than one year.

The standard for new toilets is a maximum of 1.6 gpf. Many of the new toilets now use only 1.28 gpf and some are as low as 1.1 gpf. With the new internal water flow designs, they flush effectively with these



Photo credit Earl Kendall

This is a standard two-piece toilet which uses the FloWise™ 1.28 gpf flushing design. It has a special design to simplify the assembling of the tank to the bowl section.

smaller amounts of water. There are techniques and kits to reduce water usage for old toilets, but they sometimes require double-flushes for solid wastes.

A standard gravity-type 1.28- or 1.6-gpf toilet would be your best choice for your master bathroom. They flush effectively and are reasonably quiet. Two-piece (tank and bowl) models are usually less expensive than more stylish one-piece models. They are also easier to handle in two pieces. The only drawback is the gap between the two pieces is harder to keep clean.

There are dual-flush gravity models available which use either 1.1- or 1.6-gpf for liquids or solids respectively. On some, you push the handle up or down depending upon the flush volume needed. On others, there is a dual push button located on top of the tank. Both are equally effective.

For your new first-floor half bathroom, consider installing a pressure-assist model. The incoming water compresses air in an internal tank. This compressed air creates a forceful, rapid flush. These are common in a public restroom. The flush is louder than with a gravity model which should not be a problem on the first floor.

If you have several men in your family, consider installing a small wall-mounted urinal in the new half bathroom. These use less than 1.0 gpf and flush quickly. To save space, some models are designed to collapse into the wall and are hidden when not being used.

If your house is built on a slab or when putting a toilet in a basement, it can be difficult to install the drain. In this case, use a macerating toilet which grinds up the wastes and pumps them upward (up to 15 feet) to an existing drain. These toilets are expensive, but less costly than installing a new drain.

The following companies offer water-saving toilets: American Standard, (800) 442-1902, [www.americanstandard-us.com](http://www.americanstandard-us.com); Briggs Plumbing, (800) 888-4458, [www.briggsplumbing.com](http://www.briggsplumbing.com); Kohler, (800) 456-4537, [www.kohler.com](http://www.kohler.com); Saniflo, (800) 571-8191, [www.saniflo.com](http://www.saniflo.com); and Toto, (888) 295-8134, [www.totousa.com](http://www.totousa.com).

Dear Jim: When I read books about energy conservation, I often come across the term "thermal bridge". From the context, I assume that it is not good. What is a thermal bridge? - Jeff L.

**Dear Jeff:** You are right. A thermal bridge is not good. The term refers to a gap in the insulation envelope around the living area of a house. For example, wood studs inside an insulated wall are thermal bridges. Heat readily flows through them as compared to through fiberglass insulation.

A thermal break is a gap in a heat transfer path and is good. An example is a vinyl strip separating the indoor and outdoor aluminum window frame halves. Even just a thin strip creating a gap can be effective.

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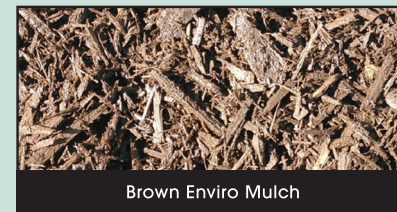
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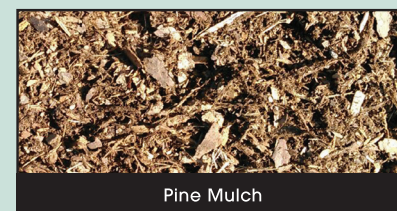
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# The environment



**MICHAEL  
TIMM**

The Boy Scout motto of “Be Prepared” was created by founder Robert Baden-Powell in 1907, and became the official motto in 1910. His intent of the motto was that “every scout should be ready in mind and body and to meet with a strong heart whatever challenges await him”. In Wisconsin this should also apply to gardening. After last year’s torrential spring rains, which progressed straight into drought, was challenging on our plants. Could we have been more prepared? Let’s take a look at some practices that will help our plants thrive even in the toughest of times.

The first step is putting together a plan of action. This is the perfect time to do it as we prepare for the coming season and things

are still fresh in our minds. Think of the problems you have had in the past and how your plants fared. Did your plants have more problems during the wet or dry times? Also make notes of any insect or disease issues you may have experienced, and when they occur. Insects and disease issues can be closely related to the weather as well. Was there a correlation? The more you can recall the better.

Where do we start? It starts with our soil. Healthy soils equal healthy plants. We can always work on improving our soils. Our soil types are normally either clay or sandy loam. These can both be a challenge, as one holds too much moisture, and the other not enough. Those of you that know me probably already know my answer to soil improvement. Yes, it’s the addition of organic matter like compost. It not only loosens clay soils to improve drainage but helps sandy soils retain moisture. It also adds beneficial organisms to the soil. If you are planting new plants, it’s as simple as adding compost to the area before you plant. And don’t be shy, the more, the better. On the existing beds, simply top dress the area with compost a little every year. It will eventually work its way into the soil. If our



Photo credit Michael Timm

**Look for abnormalities that may indicate insect or disease.**

soils can maintain a healthy moisture/nutrient balance, it reduces the chances of other problems.

Insects and disease are also more than likely to arise. Insects like slugs, earwigs,

and beetles, or diseases like powdery and downy mildew, and leaf spots come to mind. Keep an eye on your plants. Don’t forget they are out there in the elements. In the industry we call it scouting, another correlation to our Scouts. Set up a schedule to check on your plants. You have your notes, so refer back to them. Scouting more often during times of excess moisture or drought is always a good idea. I keep insect and fungal controls on hand, so I don’t have to panic if I start to see something. It’s always a good idea to try to limit the use of chemicals, but there are some great organic controls out there today. Just ask at your local garden center.

Critters can also be an issue. Many of us deal with deer, rabbits, or other creatures nibbling on, or digging around, our plants. There are many repellants out there these days that work well, along with mechanical controls. Again just ask. We must deal with them as well.

These are some of the environmental aspects. So don’t get caught off guard. Be Prepared! Happy Gardening!

*(Michael Timm is chief horticulturalist for Ebert’s Greenhouse Village in Ixonia.)*

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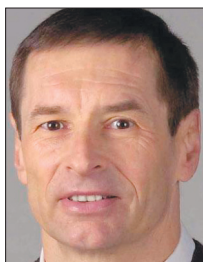
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# Fiberglass entry doors



**JAMES  
DULLEY**

**Dear Jim:** Now that I am older, I want to replace my wood front door with a lower-maintenance one. Would an insulated, stainable fiberglass door be an attractive, efficient alternative? - Kent H.

**Dear Kent:** Although new natural real wood front door is likely the most beautiful material, it is not nearly as efficient as an insulated stainable fiberglass door. Wood is a reasonably good insulator compared to metal, but much less so than rigid foam insulation inside of fiberglass skins.

If your current wood front door or a new fiberglass one you are considering has much glass as many door models do today, the door material becomes less important from an insulation level standpoint. Check the specifications for the door to determine



Photo credit Therma-tru

**This fiberglass doors can be finished to match real wood indoor trim. The outdoor surface can be stained or painted any other color.**

its relative efficiency.

For example, many insulated fiberglass doors have uninsulated wood rails and stiles along the edges. If you also subtract the area of the glass, the insulated area may be only one-half of the total door. Select a new insulated door with minimum glass for the greatest efficiency and security.

The significant efficiency advantage of a fiberglass door is does not warp with changes in humidity and requires very little maintenance. My guess is much of the chilly sensation you feel around your existing wood door is from air leakage around the edges. If a wood door is not properly maintained and regularly sealed, even the best doors will warp and leak over time.

Modern fiberglass doors have natural grain rolled into the surface. Once they are stained and finished with urethane, it is difficult to distinguish one from real wood until you touch it. They also weigh less than a solid wood door making them easier to open and close with your arms full.

I recommend using a staining and finishing kit from the door manufacturer. Most manufacturers offer a wide variety of stains and you know it will be compatible with the door surface material. Also, when it needs to be refinished, the stain in the refinishing kit will match. Even though it is fiberglass, if the door is exposed to the direct sun, it will need occasional refinishing.

There are several insulation options for fiberglass doors. Some use a preformed rigid foam insulation panel which fits inside the fiberglass skins. Others inject expanding foam inside the door after it is assembled. If both methods are done

correctly, there is not a significant difference in efficiency so don't be swayed by marketing hype about one or another.

Since you probably will want some glass in your new door, make sure it is triple-pane which provides two insulating air gaps. The insulated fiberglass door I have on my own house has the beveled decorative pane (plastic) in the middle. This protects it and makes the smooth indoor and outdoor glass surfaces easier to keep clean.

The following companies offer fiberglass entry doors: Jeld-Wen, (800) 535-3936, [www.jeldwen.com](http://www.jeldwen.com); Pella, (877) 473-5527, [www.pella.com](http://www.pella.com); Plastpro, (800) 779-0561, [www.plastpro.com](http://www.plastpro.com); Taylor Door, (800) 248-3600, [www.taylor-door.com](http://www.taylor-door.com); and Therma-Tru, (800) 843-7628, [www.thermatru.com](http://www.thermatru.com).

**Dear May:** It is fine to loosely cover the outdoor unit of a central air conditioner over winter to keep out debris, but not a heat pump. The heat pump outdoor unit needs to have air circulation to draw heat from the air.

**Dear Jeff:** Your heat pump compressor has probably been running like crazy trying to produce heat and your backup resistance has been coming on. It would be wise to schedule a service call to have the heat pump inspected.

Send inquiries to James Dulley, Newspaper Name, 6906 Royalgreen Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45244 or visit [www.dulley.com](http://www.dulley.com).



Photo credit James Dulley

**Simple insulated fiberglass panel door has small upper decorative glass for more privacy and security.**

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# Right plant, right place



**MICHAEL  
TIMM**

Choosing the right plant is important. It's essential we put the right plant in the right place as well.

We have talked about how Wisconsin has two basic soil types, clay and sandy loam. Clay can be tough on plants because it holds excess moisture, drains poorly, and can become concrete during times of drought. Sandy loam on the other hand allows moisture to run out, leaving a dry environment for our plants. So it is crucial to make proper plant selections. Let's break it down into three categories: wet, dry and clay in itself.

There are areas around that are wet and not necessarily clay, such as marshy areas or areas that flood frequently. These remain

wetter even during times of drought. One of the best places to start finding the right plants is in the water gardening section of your garden center. These are plants that don't mind wet feet. But let's start with the bigger plants and work our way down. Some trees that don't mind being on the wetter side include Willows, Swamp White and Bur Oaks, Red Maple, and River Birch. Shrubs would include Viburnums (Blue Muffin, Alfredo, and the traditional High Bush Cranberry), Chokeberry, Dogwoods, Elderberries, Inkberry, Snowberry, Pussy Willow, and Winterberry. Perennials would include Bee Balm, Cardinal Flower, Joe-Pye Weed, Big Blue Lobelia, Ligularia, Lysimachia, Marsh Marigold, Black Snakeroot, False Spirea (Astilbe), Turtleheads, and Japanese, Siberian, or Blue Flag Iris. These are just a few but a good start.

You may also have areas that are just naturally drier, such as raised areas or hill-sides. Again working from big to small, some good trees would include Red Maple, Hickories, Hackberry, Honey Locust, Northern Red and Bur oak, Lindens, and Elms. Evergreen trees that are drought tolerant include White, Red, and Scotch pine, White Spruce, and a few Junipers.



Some shrubs would include Barberries, Spirea, Summersweet, Forsythia, Privet, Ninebark, Alpine Currant, lilacs, and Viburnums. Some perennials would include Yarrow, Asters, Butterfly Weed, Tickseed, Coneflower, Blanket Flower, Liatris, Black-eyed Susan, Sages, Sedum, and sun-loving Ornamental Grasses.

What about clay? It can be sloppy wet in spring and dry and hard as a rock in summer. Believe it or not there are some plants that thrive in clay soil. A lot of these are native plants. So don't forget about the native section at the garden center. Trees such as Red Maple and White and Bur Oaks are great examples. Shrubs would include Dogwood, and Viburnum to name a couple. And there are numerous perennials which include True and False Perennial Sunflowers, Coneflowers, Liatris, Black-eyed Susan, Bee Balm, Butterfly Weed, and any member of the Silphium family like Prairie Dock or Cup Plant to name few. You may notice some plants fit under all three categories so these might be the best option if your environment changes during the year, as it does with clay soil.

So avoid impulse buying when it comes to plants and find the right plant for the right place. Choosing the right plants, along with being prepared for anything nature throws at you, will help keep your gardens looking their best throughout the year. Happy Gardening!

*(Michael Timm is chief horticulturalist for Ebert's Greenhouse Village in Ixonia.)*

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