



Advice for the Home Team Toolbox

by Dr. Debi Warner

Dear Dr. Debi,

We've never paid much attention to our landscape, but this winter ruined the few nice trees that were there. Now what do we do?

Signed, Storm Damage

Dear Nature's Cycle,

The natural surroundings of your home can make quite a difference in the way your house settles into its spot and can even make it seem homier and more inviting. I know I have been in some houses that were so sweetly nestled into their environment that I felt I was in heaven as I sat on the patio. But what do you do when the nice old trees succumb to the elements?

Partly we grieve. The 100-year-old lilac, the aged apple tree, the fabulous oak – may have lost all their charming boughs in the strong winds or heavy ice of winter. Part of nature's demand of us is to let the past go. We will remember the days of our parents' prime, the warm summer picnics, the ease of our own lives, as we played beneath the mighty reaches of these trees' green arms. They were part of the fabric of our lives, wrapping our youth and giving us the feeling of comfort, even rooting us to the earth, our homestead, nature itself. We explored their tiny forest; we built our refuges up in their boughs; we bounced in their leaves. They were always there for the background of our lives.

Now changed, what to we do? We can cherish and remember – nothing can change their meaning inside of us. But we are pressed by nature to realize we are part of a cycle of life, with sunrises and sunsets for our days, our youth, our parents, and our homesteads. The push upon us as we handle the changes in our landscape brings us some better wisdom about the world and how it really works. Somehow if we understand how things pass by, we can make better plans, adjust ourselves to today's purposes, and plan for wonderful things for our children's tomorrows.

So – dive into the reality of today to get past those losses. Walk around the yard. See what needs to be cut and removed. Imagine your yard bare of that debris. Now – walk out to the street and visualize the place with those pieces gone. You will see gaps, yes, but also openings for something new.

It may be a good time to make a sketch of your house from the road – not artistic, but the basic lines. Now add in

the plantings that are there. You might notice that the picture looks quite plain, like a stick drawing – not a critique of your drawing style, but the impact of the house itself. It can soften the picture to add some fuzzy spots here or there to smooth out the flow of the eye as it glances across the view. Those fuzzy spots you added are probably where you might want to add plantings.

What do you choose? Tall spots may need trees; round clumps may use bushes; and softening foundation lines can be done nicely with perennials. Bring your little sketch to the local landscape yard and ask for suggestions. How do you get in this time of year when they are closed? Just call them and make an appointment. You can select together the types of plantings you will want, place your order, and also determine the soil preparation.

Most of the plantings will require clearing a spot and digging up the ground. This can be done in several stages, and – importantly – with help.

Late winter days can have warm moments when it just feels good to handle the fallen branches in the yard. You can go out and drag limbs, rake debris, and get fresh air as you remove the remnants of the storm's ravages. You now have two points of view in your mind as you work – your old memories and your new plans. The tension between them will be a little wobbly in feeling, but with your exertion, you will not mind overall, while getting the benefit of working your feelings out in a refreshing way.

It is also good to think ahead of your landscape plans so that you can prevent weed growth in your target spots. You may even lay down black plastic to deter last year's plants from returning, making your soil easier to turn over when you get to it. The plastic also gives you the latitude to get to it as you can, without the pressure to beat the weeds' pace.

If you need roto-tilling, you can talk around to find a friend with one that you can trade your own services for in barter. You can also rent these at many local equipment shops. Knowing your overall plan early on, can give you the chance to plant at the best times, recruit diggers and devise rewards for your helpers. By the time you are done, you have improved your property and also built new memories of productivity, kinship, and kindness with your extended Home Team.

Have a happy Home Team!

Dr. Debi

Dr. Debi Warner is the Founder of Renovation Psychology® radio host, and author of the book, Putting the Home Team to Work, available now online at RenovationPsychology.com. Dr. Debi provides advice for greater domestic harmony to folks who are renovating their home – for True Home Improvement. This column is offered for enjoyment and enhancement and is not intended to replace your personal medical care. Photo by Bob Jenks, St. Johnsbury, Vt.

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