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NEWS RELEASE FROM THE OFFICE OF:

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Stretching Your Garden Dollar

Many homeowners are unfamiliar with the art and technique of gardening, and spend needless dollars each year on landscaping. Although dollars spent on landscaping can pay big dividends, the trick is to stretch those dollars and make the most of the money invested. Here are some money-saving dollar-stretching suggestions for you to consider:

Purchasing the biggest trees is not always a wise investment when landscaping your home. These big trees are often set back drastically during digging and transplanting, and may take years to recover from transplanting shock.

Many times, a smaller tree will re-establish itself more rapidly, producing a nicer tree in a shorter time period. With the money you save buying smaller trees, you can get a good start on the rest of your landscape.

High-quality trees are a good investment. Although there is a time and place for 'fast growers', do not overlook the dependable oak varieties, cedar elm, bald cypress, and Chinese pistachio. They will last longer, and you will have fewer insect, disease, and pruning headaches in the meantime.

Beware of door-to-door tree trimmers who insist that topping your tree is a good idea.

Topping trees opens up large wounds, leaving them vulnerable to insects, disease, and decay.

Select plants well adapted to your area. There are excellent choices available, including many excellent native varieties. You may not have the most unique landscape on the block, but at least it will be healthy.

When using chemicals, read and follow label directions carefully to avoid mistakes and save money. You can ruin quality plants by spraying before reading. Using the wrong insecticide in your vegetable garden may make the harvest unsafe for the dinner table.

Choose your fertilizer carefully. The three numbers on each bag (16-4-8, 15-0-5, for example) indicate nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium content, respectively. Know what you are buying. Avoid "Weed and Feed" fertilizers, especially on stressed grass.

Save money by making and using compost as a soil conditioner. Any home landscape has an out-of-the-way spot large enough to accommodate a compost pile. This not only saves money spent on peat moss, but it gives you an easy way to dispose of leaves and grass clippings.

Beware of 'miracle' products that may or may not aid your landscape or garden. Every year, dozens of deceptive products hit the market. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Read labels carefully, and use common sense with regard to unbelievable claims.

Top-dressing your lawn with sand or soil on a regular basis is not a recommended practice. While minor low spots can be corrected this way, you can easily overdo it and smother your lawn. Using topsoil from an unknown source may also introduce undesirable plants and weeds into the landscape, creating additional work and expense to correct the problem.

Shop and compare. While many nursery and garden supplier prices are competitive for many products, prices do vary for nursery stock and plant materials. Check several nurseries before buying, to be certain you are getting the best price for quality merchandise.

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