PLANT LIFE COLUMN

HEAT RELIEF

Record high temperatures make outdoor work nearly intolerable. Have you ever noticed how a walk in the woods is cool, while out in direct sun it seems like an oven? Trees in the woods or in your yard provide shade and prevent direct sunrays from reaching the ground, our car, our hammock or the house. The sun block effect is an important step in turning down the heat in your yard.

Objects in the sun get hot and then continue to radiate heat even after the sun goes down. You will notice this heat when playing tennis or walking on sidewalks or biking near a road. City temperatures tend to be higher than surrounding country-side due to the heat storage potential of buildings, concrete and pavement.

A shade structure reduces the heat build up on the ground, but the shade structure often heats up and stores heat. Think about the cool temperature you experience under a carport, covered porch or umbrella. The air is still hot, but it usually doesn't feel as hot as it does away from the shade.

Why is it cooler under a shade tree than under a shaded gazebo or other shade canopy? Plants act as living air conditioners, pumping moisture into the atmosphere. As the moisture vaporizes, there is a cooling effect from evaporation.

Commercial greenhouses take advantage of this effect. A fan pulls air across a wet sponge type of thing at the opposite end of the greenhouse. Evaporative cooling results in comfortable temperatures even though the greenhouse is bright and sunny.

You'll have it made in the shade if you take on one of these gardening projects.

Consider putting up a trellis or arbor to shade the west and south side of your house. The trellis provides some shade on the walls and plants growing on the trellis provide evaporative cooling. Lattice over a patio provides shade for a comfortable outdoor seating area.

There are a variety of vines adapted to our area that look lovely, but choose carefully so you don't cause problems with wood siding. Some vines will grow into the wood and cause rot and decay.

Ever been in a mist tent at outdoor events? Kids love them, but they can provide great adult enjoyment as well. If you don't have shade trees or plants on an arbor yet, you can create your own rainforest effect with a portable canopy, mist head sprinklers and pvc pipe. Mist heads create fine water droplets that evaporate quickly.

You may have noticed the mist effect in EPCOT's Mexico pavillion or at Sea World's rainforest. Consider planting a variety of tropical plants and make your own cool jungle garden. The mist cools the air and waters the plants.

Remember, water is a scarce commodity so use a timer to pulse the mist a few seconds at a time and only run it while you are in the area. Most irrigation supply houses can help you select materials for your project. Don't over do it or you will end up with a soggy mud puddle.

Of course the easiest way is to plant trees and let them be your shade structure and mist sytem.

If you are from the north, you know that winter is a dastardly time to be outdoors and you adjust your lifestyle accordingly. Locals have learned to do the same, but in the summer. Avoid the midday heat. Plan gardening activities in the early morning or early evening when temperatures are cooler. Spend midday planning your landscape to provide shade for next year. Trees can grow up to 6 feet a year so summer shade isn't a far off dream. Also plan for plants to shade the outdoor air conditioning
compressor which keeps it from working so hard.

Contact the Osceola County Extension Office for more information on trees, vines, landscape design and other gardening topics at (321) 697-3000 or on the web at http://osceola.ifas.ufl.edu. Email us at epabon5@ufl.edu.

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Date: June 1st, 2000