



HOW TO ENJOY A HASSLE-FREE, LAWN-FREE SUMMER

by Heather Matthews, Member HSPT

With spring now in full swing, we rush outdoors to observe our newly emerging gardens only to be greeted by an appalling mess—the lawn, or what is left of it after the ravages of winter. Before you run for the rake, the top-dressing and the grass seed, I would like to propose an environmentally friendlier and ultimately labour saving alternative: doing away with the lawn altogether.

If yours is one of those postage-stamp sized plots, probably dominated by a huge tree, that are commonly found in front of most city homes, this might be the most sensible solution. If you've been thinking along these lines but have been putting off what may seem to be an overwhelming task, I recommend going at it in stages. I can vouch that this is a fairly painless approach, as I began to transform my own front lawn two years ago and will finally eliminate the last small patch of grass this summer. It has been a rewarding project: I have received many compliments from neighbours and I now have more space to grow all the plants I keep collecting! (All you plant collectors take note.) When confronted with a large tree with an extensive root system, try starting with border beds around the edges of the existing lawn. These could be planted with tough, drought and shade tolerant plants and groundcover such as *cotoneaster*, *euonymus*, daylilies, *geranium macrorhizum*, or *geranium sanguineum*, *pulmonaria*, *tiarella*, *ajuga*, *gallium*, *carex*, *liriope*, *heuchera*, *hosta* and *bergina*.

If you find it next to impossible to penetrate a dense root system enough to create beds, try making small holes for smaller-rooted groundcover plants, e.g., periwinkle, *lamium* or *lamiastrum*. These have the advantage of spreading by runners that support the new plantlets until they become established. *Pachysandra* also tolerates quite heavy shade under some trees, e.g., beech, and eventually forms a beautiful carpet of bright green.

Mulch is essential to cover the bare earth between new plantings until they fill in. The mulch will cool their small roots and trap moisture. I would also recommend placing a mulch—bark chips, bark fines, pine needles or pea gravel—around any tree, radiating out from the trunk three or four feet, perhaps more if it is a Norway maple where nothing wants to grow. The ground cover can be trained to grow into this, from the outer edges, in toward the center.

For those impossible sites where truly nothing grows, consider containers: large pots, collections of pots or long window box style containers, interspersed with rocks or stepping stones and the indispensable mulch.

We will have many of the above-mentioned plants and groundcovers at our Plant Fair, as well as lots of annuals for your containers, to give colour all summer long. Also, check out our new information booth for more advice on this and other topics. Then, look forward to a relaxing, lawn-free summer. 🌸



The Horticultural Societies of Parkdale & Toronto

**CELEBRATING
175 YEARS
1834-2009**



the Soul
the City
the Garden

