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Cash In & Cool Down With Green Space?

Den Gardner, executive director of Project Evergreen doesn't take the expression "Because Green Matters" lightly. According to Gardner, "Research shows that improving the green space around your home can have real economic benefits."

Cash In

Gardner cites a number of studies which show that sprucing up your green space can help protect and, depending on market conditions, bolster home value.

For example: a study cited in *Smart Money* magazine indicated that consumers value a landscaped home up to 11.3 percent higher than its base price. In addition, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that landscaping investment is normally recovered fully and sometimes doubled by its ability to increase home value.

That sounds good, but Gardner added this important caution: "It's wise to plan before you plant. Make sure you begin landscape improvement or renovation with well-thought-out ideas for maintaining and/or improving your green space. You may want to do the work yourself and that's good exercise; however, it's always wise to seek professional advice to get the right balance and placement of trees, shrubs, grass and other plantings."

As evidence of this he cited a research project conducted by the Horticultural Research Institute. This showed that a sophisticated landscape design with trees and large, colorful bedding plants can raise the perceived value of a home between 5 and 11 percent. On the other hand, consumer reaction was that minimalist landscapes (i.e. with small plant size and low sophistication) actually decreased the perception of home value.

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Cool Down

According to Gardner, planning the right mix of trees, grass and other plantings can also make a difference in a home's energy consumption. One study has estimated that when properly placed to shade your home, trees can reduce air conditioning demand by 10 to 30 percent. Another study found attic temperatures could be up to 40 degrees lower when adequate shade was present.”

"There are two ways you take advantage of this natural cooling effect," Gardner said. "First, if you have mature trees make sure they're pruned properly to maximize shade benefits, and second, in planning for future shade, seek professional advice as to the type and location of the trees you should plant. Both steps can help lower your electrical bill. Also, don't overlook how maintaining a thick, healthy lawn and other plants also provide cooling benefits." This is due to a process known as evapotranspiration.”

"When vegetation is warmed by the sun it gives up water which then evaporates to cool not only the plant itself but the surrounding area as well,” Gardner said. He went on to add, “The result is one of nature's most overlooked, and yet most efficient cooling systems. In fact, researchers have calculated that evapotranspiration from the front lawns in a block of eight houses, produces cooling equivalent to 70 tons of air conditioning.”

Where's the best place to start improving the environment? "Right in your own back yard," says Gardner, adding, “and don't forget your front yard as well.”

Having a plan to promote the growth and health of your trees, shrubs and turf is also important in fighting global warming. For example, Gardner points out that a single tree has the ability (called carbon sequestration) to annually absorb 26 pounds of CO² from the atmosphere. This equals the amount found in 11,000 miles of car emissions. Which means that promoting tree planting in your neighborhood and area parks can pay off big. One study shows that an acre of trees has the ability to remove 13 tons of pollutants annually.

The bottom line, according to Gardner, is that efforts to improve your home's green space can benefit the environment. "Green matters," he says, "but it can matter even more when you understand how to balance the amount and placement of grass, trees, shrubs and other plantings to produce benefits for the environment and for your family's lifestyle as well. That takes some planning - but it's well worth it."

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Kirk Hunter, executive director of the Turf Resource Center agrees with Gardner’s assessment adding that the numerous benefits of turfgrass are often overlooked. Hunter comments, “Research continues to show that turfgrass not only increases a home’s value and offers substantial cooling effects, it also provides an extensive list of other benefits such as soil erosion control, dust stabilization, groundwater recharge, improved surface water quality, soil improvement, noise abatement, glare reduction, reduced fire hazards, improves mental health via a positive therapeutic impact, contributes to social harmony and improves productivity ⁽¹⁾. Most recently, research has shown that turfgrass also offers tremendous carbon sequestration. For example, nearly a ton of carbon per acre per year is stored in the soil of fairways and one ton per acre of carbon for greens on golf courses.”⁽²⁾

Project EverGreen is a national non-profit organization representing service providers, associations, suppliers/distributors, media companies, other organizations and individuals affiliated with the green industry. Project EverGreen's mission is to raise the awareness of the environmental, economic and lifestyle benefits of landscapes and promote the significance of those who preserve and enhance green spaces at home, work and play.

You can find more information about these and other benefits of green space by accessing www.projectevergreen.com, or visit TurfResourceCenter.org.

(1) “The Role of Turfgrasses in Environmental Protection and Their Benefits to Humans” - Drs. James B. Beard and Robert L. Green
(2) Ron Follett of ARS' Soil-Plant-Nutrient Research Unit in Fort Collins, Colo., and Yaling Qian of CSU ARS News Service Agricultural Research Service, USDA, <http://www.ars.usda.gov/is/AR/archive/jun03/golf0603.htm>

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