



(Photo by N.D. State Soil Conservation Service)

# PLANTS AND AESTHETIC LIVING

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One of the major facets of living in our present society evolves largely around the use of trees, shrubs and other ornamentals to enhance our environment. Use of plants in everyday life is not a new development. Ancient people — Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, and Chinese — were noted for their use of plants in everyday living. Development of formal gardens in Western Europe during the Renaissance and extending to the present day have given society aesthetic items that have proved valuable down through the generations.

Development of a new country, such as our United States, by people of diverse backgrounds has a tendency to be slow aesthetically. Search for new land areas and the impact of industrial and agricultural development left little time for aesthetic advancement. Plant usage was based largely on the plant-growing background of the settler and established first on areas with favorable growing conditions.

The midwest area of the United States was least hospitable for plant growth in the society because of its wide-open, treeless and droughty aspect. Recent sociological and industrial changes have allowed more time for people, and the use of plants for beautification and recreation has become important. North Dakota is one of the states of the midwest that is feeling the impact of these changes.

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Tree plantings have proved desirable for shelter, conservation and aesthetics.

From the standpoint of general plant usage not delineated specifically by the well-established shelterbelt aspect, there are many problems that affect the people living in North Dakota. This situation emphasizes the general area under landscaping, whether it involves the home, public buildings, parks, highway beautification, or urban development. These problems can be separated into materials available, designers and contractors, design philosophy and local problem areas.

### Problems facing North Dakotans

1. **Materials.** Even though limited by climate, the list of usable ornamental plant material is far greater than imagined by the typical consumer. **Lack of nursery production** in the northernmost part of the United States and the resultant lack of availability of many tree and shrub types often results in a list of materials so short as to cripple some good landscape design efforts. Economics is the real limiting factor, not horticultural material.

2. **Designers and contractors.** A comparable lack of designers, landscape-contractors or, in many instances, nursery-contractors makes the problem of planning and design procural singularly difficult and sometimes almost im-

possible within the allowable budget. Again, economics is the real limiting factor.

**3. Design philosophy.** Lack of adequate design philosophy for the prairies and plains makes it exceedingly difficult to develop good landscape plans. Historically, man's major landscape attempts have occurred in areas of relatively high rainfall, the dry plains and deserts having been ignored in most cases. Acceptable landscape plantings and designs have usually been equated with those classic historical examples of the humid areas. Ecologically, many are quite impossible in our climate; economically, most are impractical to consider and aesthetically many do not fit into the plains environment.

Until recent times the same influence could be seen in the very arid deserts of southwestern United States. Only that which could be irrigated (and, therefore, totally altered at great cost) was originally acceptable. But today, after the peak developments of the last decade, one may find numerous examples where the best elements of the desert have been borrowed and resultant designs are more compatible with the environment in which they exist. A desert design philosophy is developing. The prairies and plains, perhaps with less character of their own and with few resident designers, continue to adapt from the humid areas and have begun to borrow from the arid areas. Their design philosophy is yet to develop.

Numerous examples of large scale planting designs—parks, highway and recreation areas, in particular—exist that have little to recommend them with regard to function, sometimes nothing to recommend them in regard to aesthetics, and occasionally much to condemn them with regard to cost and maintenance. When design philosophy is lacking as well as a fundamental understanding of the environment, it is rare that even a highly acceptable design will occur.

Better landscape design probably will not come to North Dakota unless the state attracts more professional designers who are in tune with the prairie and plains environment.

**4. Local objectional features.** A more fundamental solution to the problem of dealing with the local "eyesores" than the eternal recommendation of a screen planting must be found. Half-hearted hiding, which is about all the average screen planting in the prairies accomplishes, is a sure way of emphasizing. Removal or alteration—whether dealing with decaying small town buildings, automobile grave-

yards or spoilbanks—as stimulated by legislation or taxation is doubtless the only true solution to major problems.

Fortunately, the northern plains area is blessed with millions of acres of crop and grazing land that are acceptably attractive in themselves and do not need beautification, only preservation and conservation efforts. The same cannot be said about all farms, homes, towns and recreation areas. It is in this area that continued effort is most needed.

Following is a listing of work which has been done in the Department of Horticulture and Forestry in the area of plant aesthetics.

Trials of woody and ornamental plant materials to determine the hardiness and quality for ornamental and shelterbelt usage.

Publication or recommendations based on evaluation of the above in books, bulletins, numerous extension circulars and occasional press releases.

Publication of bulletins and circulars on the principles of home landscape design.

Publication of bulletins and circulars to assist the property owner in avoiding or overcoming cultural problems or ornamental problems.

Present research and participation concerning plant aesthetics is involved in the following.

Continued trials of ornamental plant material (cooperative with the Regional Plant Introduction Station, Ames, Iowa, and independent departmental research).

Extension of trials to widely separated points in the state, both at branch stations and to other state and federal lands (Lincoln-Oakes Nursery, Corps of Engineers land).

Cultural investigations of better methods of establishing trees under prairie and plains grassland conditions.

Planning and approval of a North Dakota State Arboretum at Bismarck.

Participation in committees and public action groups:

Highway Department Citizens Committee —

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Capitol Grounds Beautification Committee —

D. G. Hoag

Keep North Dakota Clean, Inc. —

R. G. Askew

Capitol Grounds Arboretum Committee —

D. G. Hoag

Farm Forestry Committee —

R. H. Heintz, E. P. Lana

International Peace Garden —

R. G. Askew

N.D.S.U. Campus Committee —

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