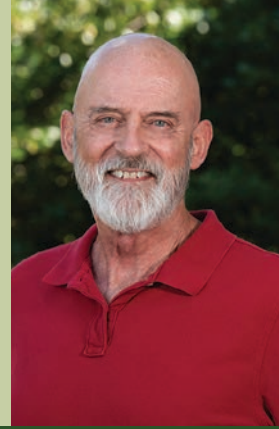


February 2022

Craig's Corner

Our in-house horticulturist/arborist, Craig Miller, dispenses practical advice for those seeking to simultaneously conserve water and grow thriving, high-visual-impact, drought-tolerant (xeriscape) gardens and landscapes. Please email questions to craig@cpnmd.org.



PRUNING YOUNG TREES

Proper pruning is essential to developing a tree with a strong structure and desirable form. Trees that receive the appropriate pruning measures while they are young will require little corrective pruning when they mature.

Newly Planted Trees

Pruning of newly planted trees should be limited to corrective pruning. Remove torn or broken branches, and save other pruning measures for the second or third year.



The belief that trees should be pruned when planted to compensate for root loss is misguided. Trees need their leaves and shoot tips to provide food and the substances which stimulate new root production. Unpruned trees establish faster with a stronger root system than trees pruned at the time of planting.

Following are a few principles everyone should understand before pruning a tree.

- ✿ **Each cut has the potential to change the growth of the tree.** Always have a purpose in mind before a cut is made.
- ✿ **Proper technique is essential.** Poor pruning can cause damage that lasts for the life of the tree. Learn where and how to make the cuts before picking up the pruners.
- ✿ **Trees do not heal the way people do.** When a tree is wounded it must grow over and compartmentalize the wound. As a result, the wound is contained within the tree forever.
- ✿ **Small cuts do less damage to the tree than large cuts.** This is why proper pruning (training) of young trees is critical. Waiting to prune a tree when it is mature can create the need for large cuts that the tree cannot easily close.

For more information, visit <https://isarmc.org/pruning>.

XERIC PLANT OF THE MONTH

Panicum virgatum, commonly known as switchgrass, is a perennial, deciduous grass native to the prairies of North America. In gardens, it is particularly valued for the upright foliage and masses of hazy flowers in early autumn followed by gorgeous fall color. Heavy Metal Switch Grass (*Panicum virgatum* 'Heavy Metal') is an attractive cultivar (cultivated variety) with metallic blue foliage covered with a waxy white bloom. In the



fall, it turns bright yellow and its pink seed heads turn burgundy in color, gradually aging to beige. This grass has a very upright, erect growth habit and will not fall over in heavy rain. Leave the seed heads and foliage alone until March or April to provide winter interest, then cut back to make way for new growth.

Use this plant in borders or as a low screen. Combine with Shasta daisies, Little Bluestem, Blue Fescues, or plant among Blue Oat Grass for contrasts of texture and height. It is quite attractive when used in groupings. It thrives in full to partial sun and prefers sandy loam soil. Heavy Metal Switch Grass is drought-tolerant once established, yet it will tolerate wet, soggy soil for short periods. This plant can be grown up to 7,000 feet in elevation, and has a mature height of 3 to 4 feet, with a 12" to 18" spread.

