

board & batten

Giving You the Dirt

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Observations and Solutions...

In my travels, I've seen a lot of problems. Some are complex and others are very simple and easy to deal with, especially if tackled early. The following are some of the more common things to watch out for.

Sadly when trees are planted, many people still tie the trunk with wire and hose. If you have wire ties, you must check that they do not become too tight and choke or 'girdle' the trunk or branch. Just loosen and re-adjust them once a year. Otherwise the tree will die or be terribly disfigured. Incidentally, if the ties have been on two years, they can usually be removed. They are only required until the tree gets its roots established.

There is a new way to stake trees. Pound t-bars, available at most garden centres and hardware stores, into the ground about two feet out on either side of the trunk, opposite to each other. Ideally, the stakes and tree should be in a line perpendicular to the prevailing wind. Instead of wire and hose, use two inch wide strips of denim, available in bulk at fabric stores, to tie the tree to the stakes about two feet above the ground. Staking low on the trunk allows it to flex in the wind, which will make it and the roots stronger. Also within two years, the fabric will rot off. This will avoid the whole problem of the wire ties getting too tight. (Thanks to the ladies from the Milton Horticulture Society for getting me to use dark denim instead of blazingly white shoe canvas!)

Another common problem is grass sneaking into the garden. One of the biggest enemies of a garden is turf grass growing from the lawn into the garden. Once it's in there, it's almost impossible to remove. The fix is a snap. Once a year, fall is best, edge the

garden to a depth of two or three inches with a half moon. This prevents the grass roots from growing into the garden over the winter. Remember, it may not look like much of a problem now but grass does much of its root growth in the winter. This means while everything else is sleeping the winter away the grass is taking over the world.

Some problems are just caused by lack of attention. While some plants need to be an inch or two higher, such as Rhododendrons, most want the soil level from the pot to be even with the surrounding soil in the garden. Pots planted too deep or not deeply enough will affect the vigor and even the chances of survival. Keep an eye on soil levels when planting and double check things in the spring, after things have settled.

Perennials grow larger and we often don't get the placement just right the first time. When the plant overtakes a neighbour or grows into the pathways, feel free to rip bits off. Just reach under that Hosta or Sedum and strategically rip off a few leaves or stems. No one will be any the wiser and all will live in harmony. Next spring, move or divide as necessary to hopefully avoid the same situation. It has the added bonus of giving you extra plants for elsewhere in the garden.

One of the biggest things I learned at the Niagara Parks School of Horticulture had nothing to do with plants. Take time to look at things with a critical eye. Think about what's wrong with things and how you can fix them. Most fixes are easier than you think once you're aware of the problem and many require only a bit of preventative maintenance.

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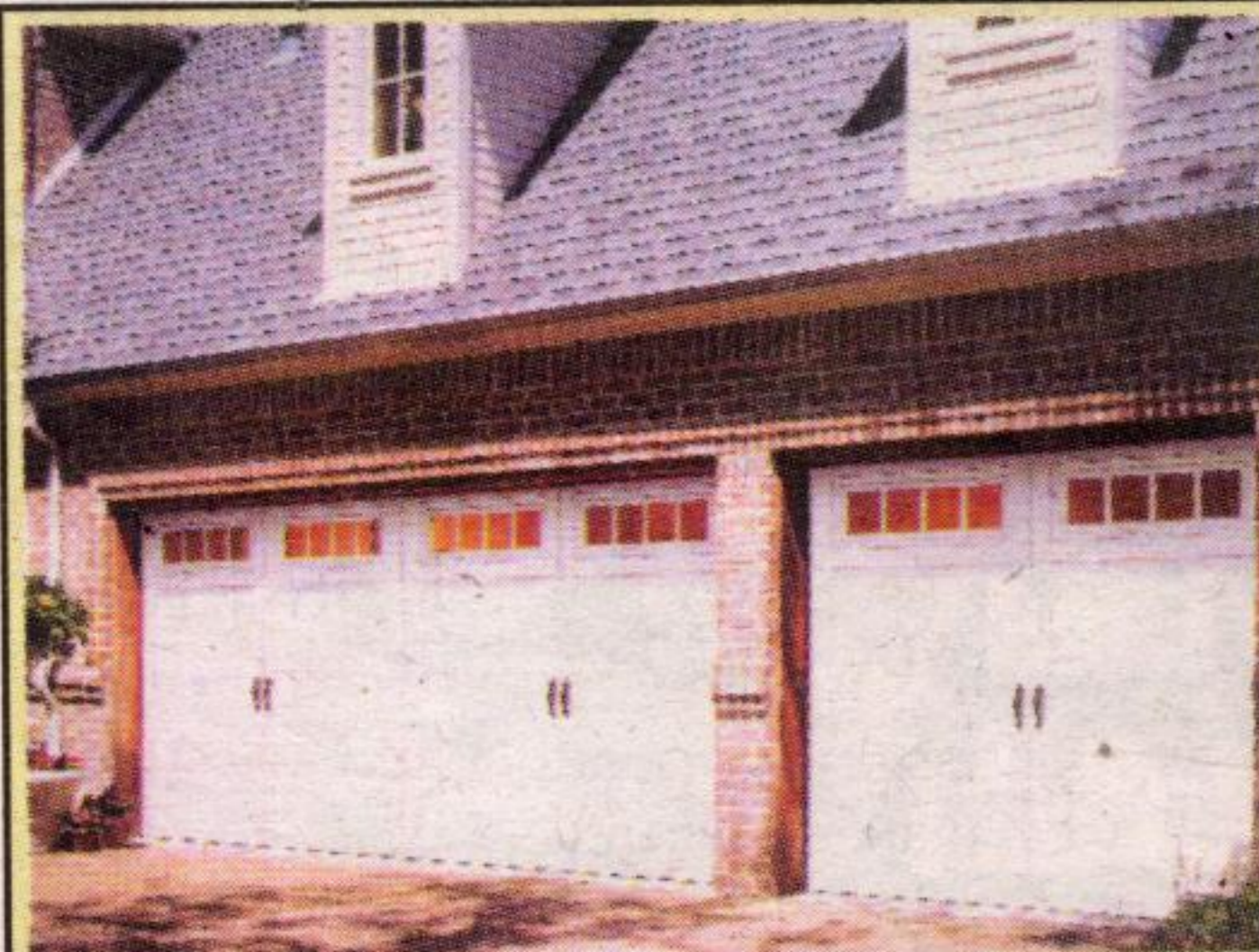
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