

Contractor's Corner

WITH RICK THOMAS



This year is winding down, and many of you will be thinking about your resolutions for the new one. Quite possibly, your list of resolutions will include improving your home, from building additions to even the smallest fix up jobs. The only thing stopping you from fixing that leaky faucet in the kitchen, or redoing that unsightly bathroom grout is simply, knowing how to begin. We'd like to help.

In the New Year the Compass will feature a brand new monthly column, Contractor's Corner, which will run in each of our Board and Batten issues. Homeowners and do-it-yourselfers are encouraged to email in questions and we will publish as many of the questions and answers as space allows in the following issue. Rick Thomas has been a contractor/renovator in the area for twenty-seven years, and has had experience in all aspects of home improvement as well as starting projects literally from the ground up.

The next issue featuring Board and Batten will run on January 14, 2005. All questions for publication will need to be received prior to January 5. Reach Contractor's Corner by emailing to askacontractor@yahoo.ca



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ALL THE COMFORTS OF HOME

Giving You the Dirt

By SEAN JAMES, N.P.D.,
PRESIDENT OF FERN RIDGE LANDSCAPING

The OTHER Christmas Wrapping

It's a most peculiar phenomenon. It happens every year at this time. All over Ontario, perfectly serviceable evergreens grow an odd fungus that looks suspiciously like burlap or even like plastic twine. Try as I might I can't figure a cause.

For some reason, folks feel that many shrubs need to be wrapped against the winter winds. One sees it on junipers, Rhododendrons and even hedge cedars. (Picture a landscaper gesticulating madly in frustration...) What's the point of planting an EVERGREEN if you're going to wrap it up!!! Everyone's looking for lower maintenance yet they create unnecessary work this way. You might as well plant something that loses its leaves.

Truth is these plants are usually perfectly hardy. If it's sold in a local garden centre it's probably tolerant of our climate and therefore it shouldn't need wrapping beyond its first winter. Since most garden centres have guarantees on their material, they're not likely to sell a plant that will just die the first winter.

I know occasionally we wrap junipers because they fall open under the weight of the snow. We do this for support. The snow starts by building up on these fluffy bits and pulling them down. More snow can sit upon the pulled down twig, pulling it down further and so on. Before you know it, a huge branch is hanging open. It never quite goes back to normal. The better way to deal with this problem is,

just before winter, to shear the shrub hard, just as if you were shaping a hedge to get rid of the feathery bits. Make sure when you're shearing not to cut back beyond the green. Most evergreens cannot grow new branches from bare stems - stems without needles. This is especially true in the fall.

I'll admit, occasionally there are valid reasons for wrapping shrubs. A cedar hedge alongside a busy road may need some protection from salt. A newly planted hemlock or rhododendron might need a bit of shelter to help get it through the winter, at least its first winter until it establishes its roots. In the case of Rhododendrons, make sure it is planted in the right place. Rhodos do need shelter from winter winds and prefer a dappled shade. If they are in the right place they won't need wrapping. Even if you can get them through the winter, they won't be happy there in the summer. Better to move them to the right location than to try and get them to live in the wrong location. The right plant in the right place!

Now sometimes we do have a habit of growing non-hardy things in Canada - roses. Most hybrid tea roses do need protection in the winter. So be it.

By the way, should you drive by my house, you'll find I don't live by my own words. My evergreens and Rhododendrons are not wrapped but I'm trying to grow a palm tree outside this year. It is wrapped, of course.

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