

Choose healthy plant foods

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Manure improves soil texture and organic matter, and organic matter is the "stamina" of the soil, improving its ability to hold nutrients and water. Manure is often low (as a percentage of weight) in the essential nutrients that plants need. Composted manure (which has been cured in rows and reached an internal temperature of 60° Celsius to kill harmful organisms and weed seeds) is also an excellent soil conditioner.

Compost recycles organic matter from your kitchen and garden back into the soil. Using compost will improve the quality of your soil, but its plant nutrient content is limited, usually containing one percent each of nitrogen, phosphorous and potash as a percentage of its weight.

Fertilizers are applied to improve a soil's fertility and to ensure that the proper nutrients are available in the amounts necessary for the plants you are growing.

Organic fertilizers are available from many lawn and garden centres. The available plant nutrients in these formulations (again, as a percentage of product weight) are lower than in conventional fertilizer and may not be enough to support plants with high nutrient needs, such as corn and other garden vegetables. It takes longer for the soil microbes to break organic fertilizers down into a form usable for plants, and the microbes become active only at temperatures above 16° Celsius. It may take more than one growing season for plants to access the nutrients in an organic fertilizer.

Manufactured fertilizers are also made from very down-to-earth sources. The nitrogen in most commercial fertilizers sold in Canada is extracted from the atmosphere. The manufacturing process traps it in a form that we can apply. Beneficial soil bacteria make it available to plants, and through the plants, the nitrogen is returned to the ecosystem.

The two other ingredients in fertilizer are phosphorus and potash. Phosphorous, the fossilized remains of ancient marine life, is mined in Florida and North Carolina, and potash (which provides potassium) is mined from naturally occurring mineral deposits in Saskatchewan and New Brunswick. These natural elements are processed in a form that makes the nutrients accessible and available to growing plants.

Many lawn fertilizers also offer the advantage of slow-release nitrogen, and the best granular lawn fertilizers have the highest percentages of nitrogen in a slow-release form. These formulations allow consistent nutrient release over a period of six weeks without risk of burning the plant.

No one source of fertilizer is more "natural" than any other, nor is it of any different value to the plant. An effective fertilizer will provide the essential plant nutrients of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium in a form that is easily available to the plant and in the optimal proportion.

—By Don Gayford
Turf and Garden Committee
The Fertilizer Institute
of Ontario Inc.



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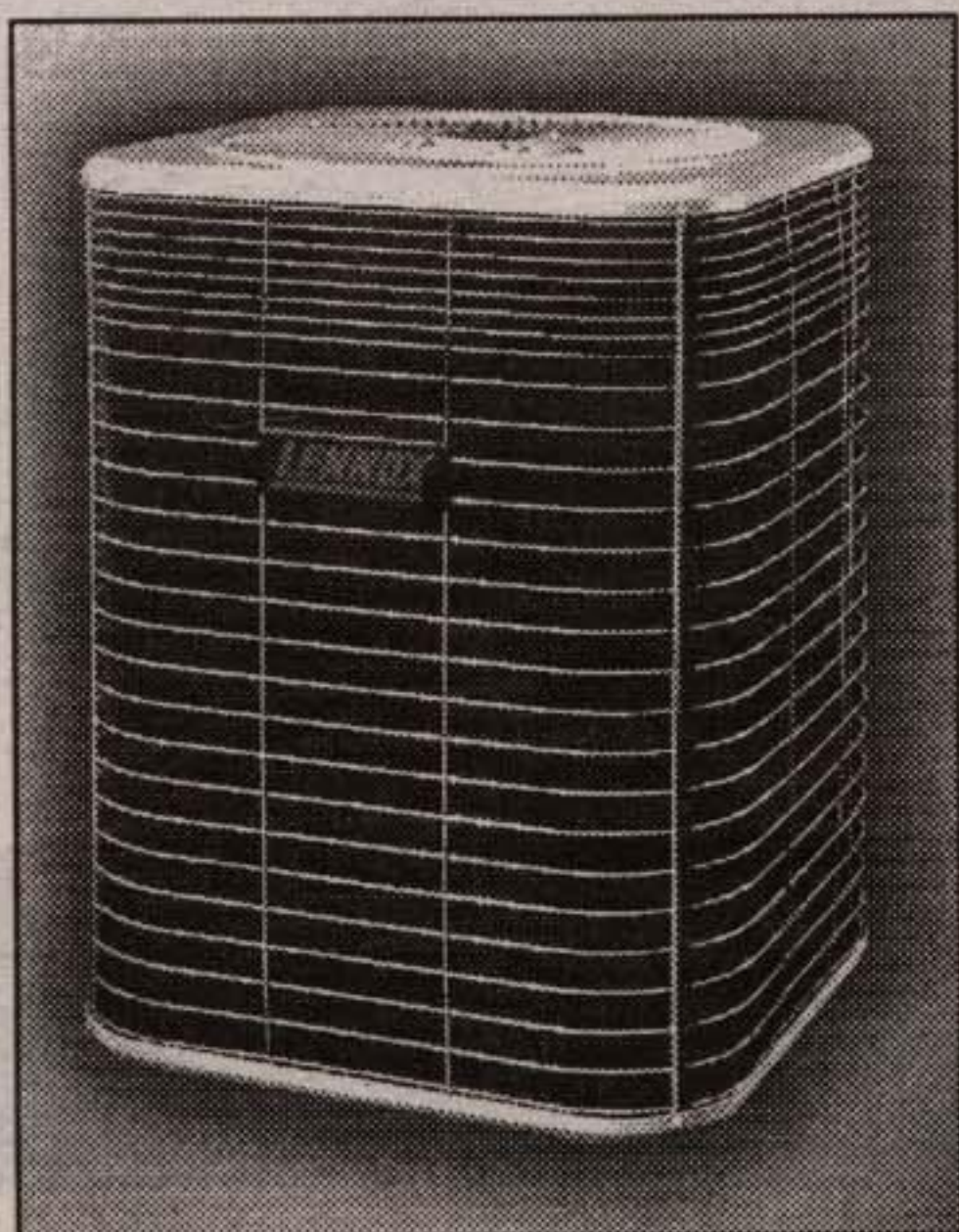
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Energy Savings by Design

Planting a tree, shrub or vine can provide benefits greatly outweighing the cost. Well-planned landscaping can not only provide energy savings, but also can increase the beauty and value of your home.

Planting trees that lose their leaves on the southern and western sides of your home provides summer shading to cool your home, lowering summer cooling costs. In winter these same trees will allow the sun to shine in to provide natural light and warmth into your home.

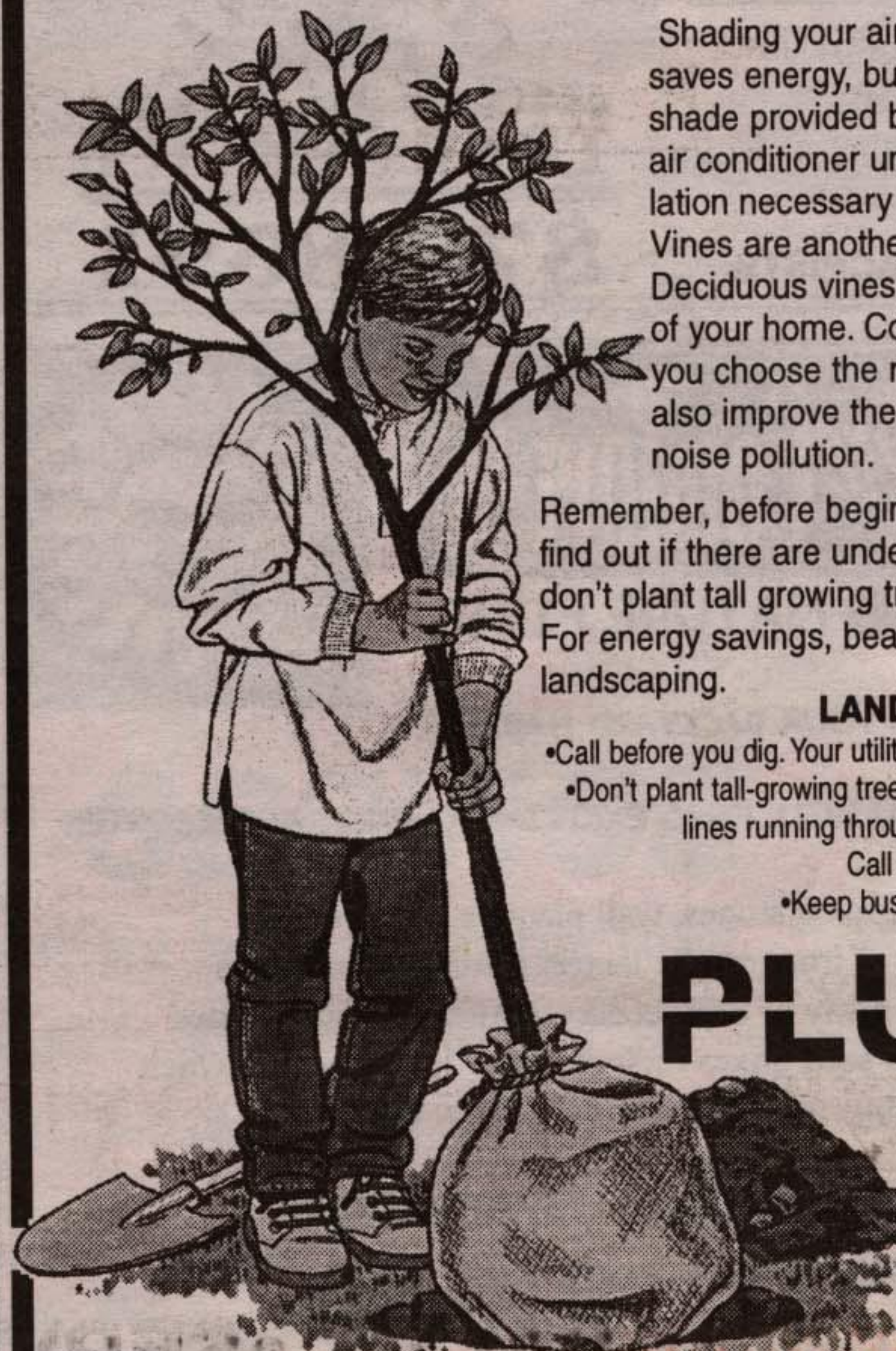
Planting trees that lose their leaves on the southern and western sides of your home provides summer shading to cool your home, lowering summer cooling costs. In winter these same trees will allow the sun to shine in to provide natural light and warmth into your home. Planting evergreen shrubs and trees on the northern and western sides of your home creates a natural winter windbreak, cutting winter heating costs.

Shading your air conditioning unit not only saves energy, but helps lengthen the life of the unit. The shade provided by a tree or shrub eases the strain on an air conditioner unit. Just be sure not to block the air circulation necessary to run the machine efficiently. Vines are another quick and beautiful energy saver. Deciduous vines provide quick-growing shade on the walls of your home. Consult a professional landscaper to help you choose the right vine. Studies show landscaping can also improve the resale value of your home and reduce noise pollution.

Remember, before beginning a landscaping project, call us to find out if there are underground lines you need to avoid. Also, don't plant tall growing trees under power lines. For energy savings, beauty and noise reduction, nothing beats landscaping.

LANDSCAPE WITH CARE

- Call before you dig. Your utility can tell you the location of any underground lines.
- Don't plant tall-growing trees under power lines. If you have a tree with power lines running through it don't climb it or build anything in it. Call if the tree needs trimming.
- Keep bush shrubs away from your meter.



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