

Sometimes an object or a person displays that certain attraction or appeal causing an onlooker to quickly take a second look. This type of reaction is what I call the wow factor. We've all experienced it.

Most everyone knows the wow factor plays an important role in the business world. Advertising agencies utilize it daily. Capturing the attention of the consumer and creating the desire to purchase is what it is all about.

The wow factor also exists in the world of gardening. Quite frequently, when homeowners develop a landscape surrounding their home, they not only include those plants and other hardscape items that have a strong appeal to them, but their intent is also to instill a look that appeals to others. A landscape with such attraction is said to have curb appeal, and curb appeal often causes passersby to take that second look and automatically think or say, "Wow!"

Some might say that by creating such a look the individual is being nothing more than vain. Perhaps that may be true in rare cases, but I am convinced that most people favor a landscape — whether private or public — that is attractive rather than one that is unattractive. Would you prefer taking your family on a picnic to an area that is neatly maintained, brimming with beautiful flowers, grass, trees and shrubs, or to an area that is unkempt, full of litter and weeds and void of grass, flowers, trees and shrubs? Perhaps one might argue that beauty is in the eyes of the beholder. To that position I do agree; however, if a landscape strewn with litter and full of weeds does not bother you, I would then say, read no farther.

Let's face it, maintaining any degree of wow factor in our landscape is extremely difficult during this time of excessive heat and drought. I am convinced, however, that we can keep that curb appeal alive with a little extra effort and continued pride — perhaps on a smaller scale. I offer a few suggestions.

Although the turf may be turning or is already brown in color, it doesn't have to look like a wasteland. Even though the lack of moisture has caused the grass to go dormant and turn brown, many weeds continue to thrive and remain green. Their contrasting color and texture makes them highly visible and unattractive. If this description sounds all too familiar, I suggest that in the cool of the day, make an effort to pull the weeds and keep the yard litter free. Fortunately, lawns that have gone dormant will generally survive when cooler temperatures return. To help insure a lawn's survival during this time of heat and drought, keep traffic to a

minimum. Many cities and villages are keeping some park areas green. If available, encourage children to play in those areas.

Colorful flowers and other ornamental vegetation growing in containers and strategically placed in the landscape can definitely add to the wow factor. Select flowers and other vegetation that are genetically heat hardy. They will be much easier to maintain and continue to offer color and beauty to the landscape. Some heat-hardy, drought-tolerant flowering annuals for containers include celosia, gazania, vinca, lantana, verbena, angelonia, penta and moss rose.

Although Mother Nature has dished out some ugly weather this summer, I firmly believe that is no reason for our landscapes to look ugly. With a little pride and some extra effort, we can change a landscape that closely resembles a wasteland to one that reflects the wow factor — even if on a smaller scale.