

NATURALLY BEAUTIFUL

CoverStory **SL**

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AFTER MORE THAN 20 YEARS
IN THE LANDSCAPING BUSINESS,
RHONDA AND CASSIE JAMES
ARE KEENLY AWARE OF ONE
INCONTROVERTIBLE FACT:
Mother Nature usually knows best.

WHILE OTHER LANDSCAPERS TRY TO
FORCE MOTHER NATURE INTO A MASTER
PLANNED BOX, JAMES LANDSCAPING
KNOWS THE BEST APPROACH TO
CREATING BEAUTIFUL AND SUSTAINABLE
LANDSCAPES IS NOT TO GET IN THE
WAY OF NATURE, BUT RATHER TO
WORK IN HARMONY WITH IT.



JAMES LANDSCAPING, INC.

NATURAL POOLS

THEIR NEW SWIMMING POND PICTURED HERE IS A PRIME EXAMPLE. IT TURNS THE NOTION OF A CONVENTIONAL SWIMMING POOL ON ITS HEAD—OR AS CASSIE PUTS IT, “IT’S ECOLOGICALLY BALANCED.”

he James’ swimming pond is roughly the size of an average swimming pool, but that’s usually where the similarities end. Instead of using chemicals to render water inhospitable to virtually any form of life (*humans included*), ponds use nature to keep the water clean. It’s a vibrant, living habitat. Plants in an adjacent bog help clean water. Fish keep algae from proliferating. Good bacteria have been added to combat bad bacteria. It attracts beneficial insects to deter unwelcome pests like mosquitoes.

A waterfall has also been worked into the design to help with filtration and oxygenation. Not only is this lush, verdant environment easy on the eyes, Cassie boasts that it’s easy on the ears as well. “I’ve been to homes with waterfalls that are so loud, you can’t

carry on a decent conversation, and you have to turn them off when you swim,” says Cassie. “We balance it out so that it’s really a pleasing environment, and it can just run the whole time.”

Ponds are also less costly and require minimal effort to maintain. Eliminating the chemicals alone frees up a large bulk of the expense. They do require a clean-out once a year or every other year, depending on the fish load, but that’s still vastly different from spending every other weekend cleaning your pool.

Swimming ponds are also an advantage when it’s time to sell your home. “Some people don’t want the maintenance of a swimming pool,” says Rhonda. “This can function either as a swimming pool or just as a pond.” And Cassie adds, “It’s just fun.”



RHONDA AND CASSIE ARE ALSO AWARE THAT MOTHER NATURE CAN HAVE A VINDICTIVE STREAK, AS SEEN DURING THE DROUGHT OF 2011. OUR REGION IS STILL FEELING ITS EFFECTS TODAY, ESPECIALLY OUR TREES.

DON’T HUG YOUR TREES WATER THEM

“The trees had to deplete so much of their energy to survive 2011 that even if they get just a little bit dry over the next seven years, they could easily die,” says Rhonda. They may have made it out of the drought alive, but they’re not quite out of the woods yet. “For the next few years, most people need to be really careful to make sure their trees are well watered. It may not die from not having water, but pathogens and insects can move in and they sometimes kill trees when normally the tree would be able to defend itself.”

Proper irrigation (*which we’ll cover a bit later*) is just one component of maintaining the health of your trees. They also recommend enlisting a tree service to ensure that trees are well fed. Yellowing tends to be a sign of a malnourished tree.

“It’s important, especially in a developed area where the ground’s been disturbed, to have a tree service fertilize it periodically, and to take a look at your mulch level,” suggests Cassie.

Mulching is a great way to keep the soil around your trees from drying out, but one of the big mistakes they’ve seen is over-mulching. “People will mulch up to the bark of the tree,” observes Cassie. “The bark of a tree is kind of like its skin. That’s like putting a band-aid around your finger and leaving it there for three months or a year. That damages the bark, and allows beetles, bugs and disease to get in. You want it to be mulched well, but you don’t want it on the tree bark.”

They’re really pushing tree health, because they’ve seen a lot of tree loss as a result of the 2011 drought. A dead tree, especially an old-growth tree, can be a big loss for an ecosystem, not to mention costly to replace. “If you lose a shrub, the shrub can grow to full size in a couple of years. With trees, that’s a huge investment as far as the whole environment,” says Cassie.



“EVEN THOUGH WE SAID TO WATER, WATER, WATER YOUR TREES—OVERALL PEOPLE DO NEED TO BE CONSCIOUS ABOUT SAVING WATER,” CAUTIONS RHONDA. “IF WE ABUSE THE WATER WE HAVE NOW, IN 20 YEARS WE MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO WATER OUR LANDSCAPES ANYMORE BECAUSE THERE WON’T BE ENOUGH WATER.”

EVERY DROP COUNTS

As fall approaches and the bitter heat of summer recedes, not only is it an ideal time to think about implementing or expanding a landscaping project, it’s also an ideal time to think about the exciting possibilities of integrating sustainable, water-smart solutions. Rhonda and Cassie are emboldened by a new law passed by the state legislature paving a way for more ecologically sound landscapes.

“The new law says HOAs cannot stop you from having a more sustainable landscape, like xeriscaping (*which is a landscaping approach that reduces the need for supplemental water from irrigation*).” You cannot be forced, for example, to use St. Augustine grass. “More people are asking: what can the environment sustain? It doesn’t have to be a cactus. It can be something like buffalo grass.” They hope the integration of native grasses in the landscape at the new George W. Bush Presidential Center will inspire homeowners to do the same.

While exciting new developments and innovations seem to crop up at a staggering pace, Rhonda and Cassie hesitate to use their clients as guinea pigs. They prefer to test out plants and techniques first and see how they perform in the uniquely challenging North Texas microclimate before implementing them in clients’ landscapes.

Irrigation, for instance, is something they’ve developed over time into an art form. They scrutinize the idiosyncrasies of each client’s yard to formulate the optimal watering plan to maintain its health and conserve precious resources. Municipal water restrictions aren’t enough.

Rhonda and Cassie challenge all homeowners, not just their clients, to be proactive about conservation, which starts by understanding your yard. Look at your soil. If you’re in clay soil, then you could probably get by with watering twice a week, while it might take more for sandy soil. Look at your sprinkler system. If it’s more than 10 years old, you should probably look into more efficient technology that’s now widely available. Look at the shape of your yard, particularly slopes. Runoff flows downhill, and you may be watering the street more than your lawn.

They also suggest the simple act of being neighborly. “It’s really amazing how many times we’ll talk to a client who says my neighbor over waters and it runs into my yard,” says Cassie. “You may be wasting water, but you’re not going to see it because it’s going to your neighbor’s yard. Communication is important.”

NATURE CAN BE FICKLE. IT CAN ALSO BE GENEROUS AND SURPRISING. OFTEN, THE PATH TO YOUR IDEAL OUTDOOR SPACE MAY BE RIGHT UNDER YOUR FEET. THE WAY MAY NOT ALWAYS BE CLEAR, BUT THAT’S WHERE A TEAM WITH VISION COMES INTO PLAY. JAMES LANDSCAPING SEES THOSE POSSIBILITIES, AND WHEN WORKING WITH MOTHER NATURE, THEY CAN MAKE THOSE POSSIBILITIES A REALITY FOR YEARS TO COME.



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