

## GOD'S TAKE ON SUBURBAN GARDENS AND MULCHING

This month's column is reprinted from *Envirotopics*, the column of the Environment Commission of the Diocese of Newcastle in the Diocesan newspaper, *Anglican Encounter*. It certainly puts a different perspective on the issue of lawns!! Only the name of the town has been changed to create interest. Barry Richardson

*In past issues of Envirotopics we have highlighted the benefits of growing local native plants and mulching gardens to reduce evaporation of water and to keep weeds under control. This somewhat humorous conversation between God and St Francis provides a subtle slant on the topic.*

**God:** Frank, you know all about gardens and nature. What in the world is going on down there in the suburbs? What happened to the huge variety of unique and special pea flowers, wattles and other wildflowers I started eons ago? I had the perfect garden maintenance plan – plants with a perfect match for their area's soil and climate; as well as a perfect match for the butterflies, birds and bees that are part of my Scheme. But I don't recall these green rectangles and northern hemisphere deciduous trees being part of the food chain in Canberra.

**St Francis:** It's the tribes that settled there, Lord, the Suburbanites. They started learning about your Schemes in the northern hemisphere and although there are many similarities, they somehow missed subtle differences. To give them credit, they are trying to correct their mistakes of the past. They are trying to 'green up' the place, they are revegetating and even trying to control cats and foxes, but .... they haven't noticed that lawns and trees from the northern hemisphere might be green but they attract the escaped insects and birds from there as well – resulting in even more competition for the natural biodiversity.

**God:** Lawns and northern hemisphere trees!! But they are so boring. I noticed that the local bird club group did a survey that showed them that exotic trees attract 5 times as many exotic birds and they certainly don't attract my lovely Blue Wren's! And the northern hemisphere trees don't lose their foliage in sync with the seasons here anyway! Over there the seasons are much sharper! Surely they've seen this when they've gratefully parked their cars under the shade of leafy trees even when it's the so called 'deciduous' season! Do these Suburbanites really want all that grass and those mismatched trees growing there?

**St Francis:** Apparently so Lord. They go to great pains to grow them. They bring in factory made fertilisers and poison or bulldoze anything not part of their 'plan'.

**God:** Well, the rain and the warm weather in Canberra probably make them grow really fast, that must make the Suburbanites happy.

**St Francis:** Apparently not. As soon as the grass grows they cut it and as soon as the trees mature and start to reach their full potential they get worried at the size of them and cut them back too.

**God:** Do they bale the grass like hay?

**St Francis:** Not exactly, most of them rake it up and put it in bags.

**God:** Why? Is it a cash crop, do they sell it?

**St Francis:** No Sir, they pay to get it taken away. It's the same story with the trees.

**God:** Now let me get this straight. They fertilise the grass and exotic trees so they will grow and when they do grow they cut them off and pay to have them taken away?

**St Francis:** Yes Sir.

**God:** These Suburbanites must be relieved in the summer when the heat slows the growth and saves them a lot of work.

**St Francis:** You aren't going to believe this Lord, but then they pay more money to water them so they can continue to mow and chop and pay to get rid of them.

**God:** What! Oh well, at least while the deciduous trees are alive, they provide shade in summer and then in autumn they form a natural blanket to retain moisture and protect the roots and shrubs, plus as they rot they enhance the soil – which was a part of my Scheme.

**St Francis:** You had better sit down Lord. As soon as the leaves fall off the Suburbanites rake them into great piles and pay to have them hauled away.

**God:** No! What do they do to protect the tree roots and shrubs and keep the soil moist and loose?

**St Francis:** They go out and buy something called mulch and spread it around in place of the leaves.

**God:** And where do they get this 'mulch'?

**St Francis:** They cut down trees and grind them up to make mulch.

**God:** Which trees? .... No, don't tell me .... I don't want to think about this anymore!!

Written by *Maree McCarthy* and reprinted with permission from the *Australian Plants Society Newcastle Group Newsletter, August/September 2004.*