

Save Money and Water with Smart Lawn and Garden Tips



(ARA) - Summer 2009 may be a bit less dry than last year in some areas of the country, according to the National Weather Service's Seasonal Drought Outlook. But it still makes sense, both environmentally and economically, to conserve water as much as possible in your gardening and landscaping efforts.

"Nothing shouts 'green' quite like a thriving garden or a lush landscape," says Susan Thayer, an irrigation and water conservation expert, "... except, perhaps, a beautiful yard or garden that's been nurtured with green practices that conserve precious water."

While drought in some mid-northern areas is expected to improve, dry conditions will likely persist in areas such as California, Texas, Florida and North Carolina, according to the Seasonal Drought Outlook map. One thing that isn't likely to change anytime soon, however, is the need to cut costs and conserve resources during an economic recession.

Conserving water makes sense environmentally, and can also help your family reduce your water utility bill this summer.

It is possible to grow a thriving garden and nurture a lovely landscape while minimizing water consumption and saving money on your water bill. A combination of native-friendly plants, smart agricultural practices, alternative water sources and efficient irrigation can help keep gardens and lawns growing healthy throughout dry summer months.

Here are some tips for conserving water and saving money by reducing your water

bill in your corner of planet.

- Choose drought-resistant native plants for your landscaping needs. Your options won't be limited to cactus, either. From ornamental grasses to shrub roses, many drought-tolerant native species also offer bright color and visual appeal. Look for plants that do well in the driest conditions found in your geographic region. Your local Cooperative Extension office can help you identify plants that are right for your area. You'll also find plenty of ideas online at sites like www.gardeners.com.

- Groom soil for optimum water absorption and retention. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service recommends adding water-retaining organic material to your soil. You can also reduce evaporation by using mulch in landscaping beds.

- Look for alternative water sources other than the outdoor tap – such as collecting the water that drains from your air conditioner. Consider collecting roof runoff in a rain barrel for use in flower beds and vegetable gardens.

- Irrigate efficiently with low-volume irrigation systems and smart watering practices. Many communities now require all newly built homes to use low-volume irrigation in their landscapes. On average, micro sprinklers and drip irrigation uses 80 to 90 percent less water than traditional irrigation systems.

"The key is to apply water only exactly when and where it is needed," Thayer says. Drip and micro spray irrigation provide optimum efficiency with minimum waste and over spray.

- Design your landscaping to minimize evaporation. Windbreaks and fences slow the movement of the wind over the ground and the evaporation it causes, according to the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

To learn more about low-volume irrigation, visit www.misterlandscaper.com. For more information on water conservation, go to www.nrcs.usda.gov.

Courtesy of ARAcontent.com. •

Colorado

from front page

Kansas and Texas. We on the other hand have no motivation to escape the comforts of Manhattan Beach. In fact the minute we leave, the June gloom's coastal fog lifts and becomes a splendid July, our friends can't wait to e-mail us. Happens every year. But we still love the mountains for a while in the summer. So while the happy homeowners are often stuck mowing the lawn or waiting patiently for the plumber to show up, we wiz by to hike among the wildflowers along yet another mountain trail.

So once again Southern California pulls up to our rented home among the pines, aspens and cottonwoods, trout-filled rivers and lakes, grazing pastures, red rock mountains, and snow-peaked mountaintops. After our usual breakneck flurry of getting out of town, we anticipate the beauty of doing nothing; just "being."

But one glance at our ready-to-go SUV belied that notion. It was jammed full with two kayaks, two fishing poles, two sets of golf clubs, two computers, a printer, a box of unnecessary special foods and vitamins--as if we were leaving the civilized planet--and a few novels and watercolor paints at the bottom of the heap. The problem is, wherever you go, you take yourself with you. I, like most of the people I like hanging out with, find "doing" comes easier than "being."

I have known the existential bliss that comes from being totally removed from my known world. Stretches in the back-country of the Sierras, and certainly while trekking for 10 days in the Himalayas of

Nepal, all normal concerns just rolled off my back. That is probably while people like camping, or at least put up with it, to be away from the urban frenzy and enjoy the grandeur of nature. Durango is not quite that removed. We still have to get in the car to go anywhere. Activities at Fort Lewis College, a summer concert series, and lots of charming restaurants beckon us as well as being a good thing for the permanent residents. And if you are married to a TV addict as I am, there is no getting away from the stock market bouncing up and down like a bungee, or the attraction each summer of Wimbledon and the Tour de France. However with no chores, we take off every day on one adventure or another: hiking, kayaking and fishing, off-road jeeping or ATV riding.

Paddling kayaks across magnificent Lake Electra with rarely another boat in sight, joining John with a fishing rod with no requirements to catch a fish, is a meditation itself. Then laying in the pine needles along the banks of the lake with only the sound of the water lapping against the shore, the chirp of birds and the scent of pines wafting through the dry warm air, I let the book I am reading slip from my hands and for a short while enjoy *il far bel niente*--the beauty of doing nothing. If only I could make those moments happen on the beach when I am back home in a couple of weeks.

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Entertainment



TRANSFORMERS: REVENGE OF THE FALLEN

A college freshman, his auto mechanic girlfriend and others get wrapped up in yet another battle between good and villainous shape-shifting, extraterrestrial robots where the future of humankind rests in the balance. Action/Adventure, PG-13.

Several years ago, high school students Sam Witwicky (Shia LaBeouf) and Mikaela Banes (Megan Fox) found themselves in an unexpected battle between shape-shifting, extraterrestrial robots. The good Autobots, led by Optimus Prime (voice of Peter Cullen), were trying to find a powerful cube known as the Allspark, and hoped to do so before their enemies, the Decepticons, led by Megatron (voice of Hugo Weaving), used the same to turn ordinary Earth-based electronics into robots that would rid the planet of Earthlings.

With the help of military figures such as Captain Lennox (Josh Duhamel) and Sgt. Epps (Tyrese Gibson), Agent Simmons (John Turturro) of the U.S. Government's top secret Sector Seven, and various Autobots -- such as Bumblebee (voice of Mark Ryan) who has the ability to near instantaneously convert into Sam's sports car, like the other Transformers with similar powers -- the good guys prevailed and Megatron was sunk deep into the ocean.

Now, as the humans and Autobots have formed an alliance to keep Earth safe from the Decepticons, Sam's saying goodbye to both his parents, Ron (Kevin Dunn) and Judy (Julie White), as well as Mikaela as he heads off to begin his freshmen year in college. There, he meets his high tech roommate, Leo (Ramon Rodriguez), but before the day is done, Bumblebee and Optimus Prime have arrived, with the latter asking for Sam's help.

It seems that one of the original Prime Transformers, The Fallen (voice of Tony Todd), has arrived and wants vital information that now resides inside Sam's head from his brief contact with a leftover sliver of the Allspark. With Mikaela joining him, Sam goes on the run with the aide of Bumblebee and jive-talking Autobots Mudflap (voice of Tom Kenny) and Skids (voice of Tom Kenny), and some unexpected help from ancient Transformer Jetfire (voice of John Turturro).

From that point on, another massive battle looms on the horizon, with the U.S. military -- despite being hampered by the arrival of presidential liaison Galloway (John Benjamin Hickey) -- battling alongside the Autobots in hopes of defeating The Fallen and the recently resurrected Megatron.

Our take: 3 out of 10

Although there are plenty of humans to go around in the world, people have long had an obsession with creating robots, nay, androids, that are as human as possible. Even so, and despite great strides in such regards, we still have a long way to go in terms of realistic physical movement, speech, and especially personality.

Based on the popular toy line, the film grossed more than \$700 million worldwide, but clearly was no favorite of most critics, especially since those Autobots and Decepticons had more believable human qualities (good and bad) than most of their real counterparts. Still, it was undeniably quite a show, and one really couldn't ask for more, at least in terms of bang for your visual bucks spectacle.

Except, perhaps a little soul, but returning

director Michael Bay apparently sold his long ago down at the crossroads in exchange for long-standing and mostly mega success. And that's likely to continue with the inevitable sequel, "Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen," that easily could have instead been subtitled "Bigger, Busier and Burned-Out" due to being more of the same, this time on steroids.

While the return of battling bots, bodacious babes and juvenile humor (not just one, but two views of dogs vigorously mating for your viewing pleasure!) might appease the same sorts who loved the original (namely adolescent or like-minded males), whatever small degrees of charm and fun were present the first time around have pretty much been obliterated by Bay and company.

None of which should come as a surprise considering the make-up of the original. Yet, call me Pollyanna if you will, but you'd still think that with the hundreds of millions of dollars and ungodly amounts of computer horsepower and processing time stuffed into this bloated and once-again overlong spectacle just a little more time, energy and maybe even money would go into creating a better script to accompany the visual theatrics.

Yes, it's undeniably impressive in the latter regard, but a little of that goes a long way, and without something substantial behind it, the overall effect becomes nothing more than pomp trumping circumstance. Screenwriters Ehren Kruger, Roberto Orci & Alex Kurtzman provide a semblance of a plot -- something to do with the usual villains needing one last piece to complete their megalomaniacal domain -- but it's just a bare bones skeleton upon which Bay hangs all of his gee-whiz visuals like so many gaudy Christmas decorations.

Much of the original cast returns, but there are no improvements in what's essentially more of the same. Shia LaBeouf is just going through the motions (about the only interesting thing with him is waiting to see how his real-life busted wrist issue is woven into the storyline), and the first view of co-star Megan Fox (bent over and partially astride a motorcycle in small denim shorts) is really all you need to know about her character.

Josh Duhamel and Tyrese Gibson seemingly have less to do this time around on the U.S. military side and Kevin Dunn and Julie White again do their comic relief parents bit (this time she gets high rather than tipsy for laughs). John Turturro tries to liven things up a bit upon his return in the second half, but new to the fold Ramon Rodriguez does little as the protagonist's college roommate, and some jive-talking Autobots additions are certain to go down with Jar Jar Binks as shockingly racist computer-generated caricatures.

Considering that and the rest of what's offered, I'm guessing ol' Beelzebub is enjoying his buy one, get one free deal with Bay. You know, that's where the director will end up going you know where in exchange for his not unlikely but still disappointing success, while the rest of us are put through hell having to watch his output.

Oh wait, we've already done that, at least in terms of artistry that doesn't involve special effects. Once again missing a golden opportunity to take a fan boy flick and turn it into something special or memorable, Bay puts a ton of eye candy up on the screen. But with too much of that and nothing to provide a balance, all it's likely to do for non-rabid fans is induce an overload headache.

Simply put, if you really enjoyed the first film despite of but fully aware of its flaws, you might have the same reaction here as most everything has been amped up several notches.

For everyone else, it's just louder and busier noise that's occasionally visually spectacular, but ultimately empty and near completely soulless. "Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen" rates as a 3 out of 10.

Courtesy of Screenit.com •