

THINK CANOPY TO SAVE WATER & CONSERVE ENERGY

If we develop and maintain our gardens wisely, we will not only return our landscape to its natural subtropical look, but also reduce energy and water costs. Water-guzzling lawns do not contribute to this effort, but trees do, and they begin the process by developing a canopy.

Canopy is the dappled-light form of shade that exotic tropical plants require to grow their best. Using simple design elements, any homeowner can create areas of canopy in the yard that are beautiful and energy efficient.

Trees planted on the south and west sides of a house minimize afternoon heat. Plant them about 10-12 feet from the side of each wall to produce the most shade. Of course, it is important to consider the fixed scapes, including sidewalk, pool, parking areas, septic tank and air conditioning units. Always provide shade on your air conditioning unit to promote efficiency.

Good tree selection and careful pruning help to keep trees up and damage down while creating canopy. For medium to large trees, try the Live Oak (*Quercus virginiana*), Black Olive (*Bucida buceras*), Gumbo-Limbo (*Bursera simaruba*), Pigeon Plum (*Coccoloba diversifolia*), West Indies mahogany (*Swietenia mahogoni*), Wild tamarind (*Lysiloma latisiliqua*) and Geiger tree (*Cordia sebestena*). Flowering trees such as Cassia (*Cassia fistula*), *Tabebuia argentea*, Weeping Bottlebrush (*Callistemon viminalis*) or my favorite, Verawood (*Bulnesia arborea*), also serve as good canopy.

For smaller trees, try the Dahoon holly (*Ilex cassine*), Silver buttonwood (*Conocarpus erectus* var. *sericeus*), Green Buttonwood (*Conocarpus erectus*), or the Lignum vitae (*Guaiacum sanctum*). If fragrant trees appeal to you, consider including Wax myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*) and Allspice (*Pimenta dioica*).

Newly planted trees should be watered every day for the first two to four weeks. Watering can be reduced to every three or four days, four weeks after installation. To make your watering efforts efficient, build a dimple of soil around the roots to direct water into the root zone.

Your canopy can continue to conserve energy after it sheds leaves, as all trees, even palms, will do. Plant ground covers with mulch to collect fallen leaves and hide them, as if by magic. The use of water-conserving plants, mulch and compost will contribute energy savings. And remember: Lawns are thirsty; trees can save water and conserve energy while creating drama in the landscape. Think Canopy!

To see a great canopy visit Flamingo Gardens, south of I-595 on Flamingo Road.