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*By Tammy Adams*

A fairly recent trend in landscaping has both residential and business landscapes moving toward a more natural, native look with low maintenance and a low need for watering. This trend suits Rhonda James, president and owner of James Landscaping, Inc., just fine as it is a theory she has believed in her entire career.

"Most people don't want to spend their entire weekend manicuring their landscaping," she said from her Southlake-based business. And certain choices of plants, many native perennials for example, will simply thrive better here. "If you go a hundred miles in any direction from here, the plant material changes."

With 12 years of landscaping experience in North Texas and a degree in horticulture, James certainly knows a thing or two about the business of making things not only grow but also flourish. She comes from a farming family in New Mexico and while exploring various fields of study at West Texas State University, James stumbled upon a horticulture class. "It was a like a brick fell on my head and I said 'Okay, this is what I'm supposed to be doing,'" she recalled with a smile.

Her decision has paid off. A move to the Metroplex more than a decade ago has enabled James to establish a multi-faceted business with an impeccable reputation for excellence of service and beauty of product. The primary focus is on the design and installation of plantings, patios, landscape lighting and even natural water features. However, she also offers work in the area of drainage and irrigation.

Natural water features can range from a small decorative pond to a complete ecosystem with waterfalls, streams, plants and fish. James' dedication to her product shows here, too, as she has built and maintained a pond for research and development purposes for more than two years.

Susan Doyle, a Grapevine resident, stumbled upon James Landscaping, Inc. after seeing an advertisement in the local newspaper there. "We had been through several other companies," she said. Doyle had a major problem in her heavily wooded, all natural back yard. Drainage. "We had pools of water everywhere whenever it would rain," she said. "Rhonda basically took a mess and made it into something beautiful, something we could really enjoy."

From all kinds of plantings, a rose garden and flagstone paths to swings, benches and a bridge to go over the dry riverbed area, the Doyle's now have a place where they can relish spending time. "And we have no problems with drainage anymore, whatsoever," she added.

"Working with Rhonda was so easy and she literally has the best crew I've ever seen," said Doyle. "We thoroughly enjoy our backyard now."

Another satisfied customer, Gina Broussard, was so satisfied she became the company's vice president. A corporate businesswoman working on her MBA, Broussard recently adopted



a son and was looking for a way to scale her career back to a part-time basis. James approached her about coming on board. The two women, already friends, make a superb team. Broussard's business sense coupled with James' passion for plants and an astonishing eye for detail, make this strong company even stronger.

Broussard came to the company at an ideal time as the fall begins a busy season for James Landscaping, Inc..

"Fall is the ideal planting time," said James. "Temperatures are usually mild and we typically get a lot of rain. It allows the plants to get established and the root system grows even through the winter. Then in the spring, it can get even more established before it has to deal with the Texas summer heat."

And a tip from James-"Do your major planting in the fall and then water through the winter, especially if it is light on rain." And plants especially need to be watered before a very cold spell because it is in a freeze that plants can actually dry out because the moisture is pulled out of them.

And that trend toward water conservation in landscape design? James has many ideas here as well. "There is a concern in the future about a water shortage so we really need to consider that in landscaping," James said.

"Grass takes more water than any other plant," she said. James favors moving toward more drought-tolerant ground covers and plants in place of grass where possible. "People think that to have a water-conscious landscape you have to have something like you would find in Arizona but that's just not true," she insists. "There are many luscious plants that are drought tolerant."

But, most importantly, James recognizes that there are as many different needs and desires from her clients as there are ideas from her team of experts, so her focus has always been working closely with each client to establish exactly what he or she wants.

"Our main focus is to make our clients' world a more beautiful place," she commented. "Our specialty is listening closely to their needs and desires and then making that come to life for them.

"Landscaping is one of the 'best return on investment' improvements you can make for your home," she added. "It actually increases in value as the plants and trees mature."