

WILD Winter Weather

The winter of '09 -'10 will linger in our memories for good reason.

In terms of snowfall, we have emerged from a record-breaking year. At KCI, 16 days with at least one inch of snowfall were recorded. That's a new record (since 1888, anyway).

We also endured two multi-day snowstorms with six or more inches of snow. Only nine snowstorms in the past 20 years have dumped that much on us!

Snowfall amounts varied across the metro, but everyone saw well-above-average totals. Our area's average snowfall is 20.4 inches. This past winter's totals ranged from 30.4 in Lee's Summit, to 48.6 in Leavenworth.

Still want more proof that this was a wild winter? Between 1988 and 2010, only five winters saw 40-plus inches of snow.



Our friends at WeatherorNot.com calculate that a winter like the one we just had can be expected only every 25 years or so.

Will our record-breaking snowfall have any impact on our landscapes as we look toward summer? Yes! See our article about this summer's weed outlook. Also, though we human beings might have been shivering more than usual, the insects overwintering in the soil were snug as a bug. That's because the prolonged snow cover kept the soil from freezing as deep or as long as it normally would.

According to Dennis Patton, Johnson County K-State Research and Extension Horticulture Agent, under snow cover the soil temperature was still hovering around 33 degrees, even when the air temperature was minus-eight degrees.

Bottom line? We still need to remain especially vigilant about monitoring our landscapes for any pest outbreaks this spring and summer.

Summer Outlook: WEEDY



Our wild winter weather, combined with an unusually cool, wet summer last year, has set the stage for a very weedy summer.

"Last year's summer was cool and moist, with some rain almost every week. Because of that, the weeds thrived and produced a lot of seeds," explains Alan Stevens, Ph.D., with the K-State Horticulture Research and Extension Center in Olathe, Kan.

The particularly snowy winter that followed provided insulation from freezing temperatures, so all those weed seeds survived to harass our lawns and flower beds this summer. "Look for more weeds in the grass and shrub beds. Especially as our soil temperatures come up, many dormant weeds will come up later, says Stevens."

The best way to combat the weed invasion is to keep a healthy mulch layer on shrub beds. Replenish thin mulch to block light from reaching weed seeds, which will help keep them from germinating. Lawns that are not in optimum condition will need extra attention to help the grass compete with weeds, and additional post-emergent treatments may be necessary this year.

Signature Landscape President Bill Gordon and his team have already been doing battle against weeds this spring. "This year the broadleaf weeds, particularly on newly contracted properties have come on like gang busters," he says. "At this point in the season, we typically do a spot treatment for broadleaf weeds to be followed with a blanket application in the early fall. This year, in many cases, we have gone to a springtime blanket application to control the heavy dandelion population."

K-State's Stevens says people just shouldn't be too surprised to find more weeds this summer, especially as our cool wet spring has given the weeds yet another season of their favorite conditions.

Employee Profile

Internship leads to permanent position for landscape architecture grad.



Not just one summer internship at Signature Landscape—Brett Gordon spent two summers interning at Signature before he graduated from college.

Brett was working toward his Bachelors of Landscape Architecture at Oklahoma State University, and he served as intern the summer after his junior year, as well as the summer after his first senior year.

But then, in 2007, he graduated. He did what most new architecture grads do; he found a job in architecture. So he and his wife, Erin, moved to Houston where he worked for an architecture firm called TBG Partners. There must have been something special about those two summers though, because late in 2008 he and his wife moved back to Kansas City and Brett returned to Signature Landscape. This time, he wasn't an intern. He was an account manager.

At Signature Landscape, the account managers work every day to make sure their customers are satisfied with the work performed at their properties. Actually, they aren't content to know the customer is merely satisfied; they are dedicated to exceeding the customer's expectations.

Because quality service and strong relationships are so important at Signature, the company takes a unique approach to structuring its employees into work teams.

Brett explains, "We have production managers, which takes the responsibility of scheduling and tending to the crews off of our shoulders. This allows us (account managers) to give our full attention to our customers."

Initially Brett was drawn to landscape architecture because it would afford him the chance to work outside. He's since found additional reasons to love his work. "The best parts of my job are the lack of monotony and the customer relationships I've developed," he says.

A typical day starts early for Brett. "I try to get in, and say hello to all of the crews before they head out first thing in the morning. From that point, it is simply working to serve each customer to the best of my ability, and make their time with Signature enjoyable."

As with nearly everyone at Signature Landscape, it's hard to imagine their long work hours allow for much time for leisure activities. But Brett, who enjoys his time off at home with his wife, their two cats and one dog, insists he still has time for his favorite interests outside of work: sports and golf.



Zona Rosa

CREATIVE CONTAINERS DISTINGUISH UPSCALE SHOPPING CENTER.



Zona Rosa is no strip mall. It's more like the downtown heart of a charming small town, with public parks and fountains tucked around every corner. Benches and fountains offer a fresh-air break or lunch spot for the 1500 or so employees of the companies that call Zona Rosa home. It's also home for the residents of the luxury loft-style apartments located above the retail shops.

Developed, owned and managed by Ohio-based Steiner + Associates, Zona Rosa epitomizes that company's values and aesthetic, which it describes as "planned public spaces that are beautiful, commercially vital, universally accessible and always unforgettable."

That's why, when Zona Rosa opened in 2004, Kansas City's Northland didn't just get more places to shop. It also gained greenspace, public parks, and an attractive new outdoor venue for civic events.

"People will ask which retail store is the Zona Rosa anchor tenant," says general manager, Rosemary Salerno. "None of the stores is the anchor. The parks and public spaces within Zona Rosa are the anchor."

With trees, plants and water features considered integral to the overall design of the property, "Steiner expects very full, lush landscaping, especially in the open public spaces," explains Rosemary.

Signature Landscape is charged with maintaining that landscape for Zona Rosa, including mowing, mulching and tree care, which it has done for four years.

"The property is challenging in that it isn't a typical property," says Mandy Moss, Signature Landscape Account Manager for Zona Rosa. "Normally, mowing is the biggest task, but here it's the opposite."

That's because, in addition to the small parks with their neatly manicured areas of grass, the development's lush landscaping effect is achieved mostly through the 480 distinctive container plantings located at each corner and at strategic focal points throughout.

"The planters set us apart from other developments and we put a big emphasis on them," says Rosemary.

Signature Landscape gives the Zona Rosa planters three wardrobe changes annually. Around Mother's Day, Signature plants the summer annuals. These are switched out in the fall with plants like mums and decorative kale. Going into winter, the planters get a holiday makeover featuring small evergreens and holly.

For each seasonal planting, Signature Landscape employees design a planter theme incorporating nontoxic plants in a variety of colors, shapes and textures that can be mixed and matched for a harmonious effect.

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Zona Rosa

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But perhaps the biggest task is watering the 480 containers. Three times a week, a Signature Landscape employee begins watering around 4 a.m., and is usually finished by noon to minimize any inconvenience to Zona Rosa visitors.

Zona Rosa management appreciates the effort Signature puts into the property. "Signature provides attention to detail, variation, and a unique flavor," says Rosemary. "They are very accessible for addressing any problems or concerns."

Visitors and shoppers appreciate Signature's work, too. They often comment on the landscaping, says Rosemary. And it seems they may be using the Zona Rosa planters as inspiration for their own gardening.

"Usually they want to know what kinds of plants are in the containers," she adds.

“The planters set us apart from other developments and we put a big emphasis on them.”



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Brett Gordon



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Turning Leaves is a seasonal publication of Signature Landscape. We welcome your questions, comments and suggestions. Please contact:

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