

Yards Are Really Distinctive Showplaces (*YARDS*) Program

The *YARDS* program began in the mid-1980s and was a way to use competition and reward to encourage beautification throughout the City of Hampton.

The initial criteria were formulated by 'Griff' Griffin, a Master Gardener, and included an intricate and detailed evaluation process. Later, Master Gardener Bob Moesch and Cooperative Extension Agent Jim Williams streamlined the criteria which focused on environmental sensibility more than just beautification.

YARDS judging takes place April through September, with actual nominations by the public accepted beginning in March. Nominees receive a congratulatory letter and a packet that includes permission to view the property/landscape and use for publicity purposes, and an environmental survey that the nominee must complete and return.

Nominations are sent to the *YARDS* coordinator who then arranges for monthly judging of the yards, with no more than five (5) scheduled for viewing. Judging normally takes place the second Monday of each month, and is rigorously mapped out by the routing coordinator to insure ease and timeliness in viewing the properties. Yards are given numerical rankings, and the top-scoring yard receives a winner's yard sign and gift certificates provided by area garden centers. The next two high-scoring yards receive honorable mention yard signs.

In October, a compilation of the monthly winning yards are re-evaluated and a *YARD of the Year* is selected, with the winner receiving, as an award, a portrait of their home and award-winning landscape. All participants receive certificates of commendation.

YARDS judges' training takes place in April of each year and participation is open to the public. The only criterion for training is that the participant has some horticultural background or has an avid interest in learning about horticulture and its environmental impact.

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