

Landscapers Tips N' Tricks

101 observations and reminders to read
remember and live by.

By: Andrew and Daniel McCurry

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Foreword

We have been landscaping now for over 35 years and the experiences we have had has led us to write this informative resource. The writing of these lessons took just over an hour as stories that have helped create this list are fully engrained in our memories. I believe you will find these tips extremely rewarding as you are working to become a craftsman of your trade. And what a great trade we are in! I cannot think of another industry that I would like to invest so much of my time into. Working with the earth is respectable enough but the people you meet along the way make it most rewarding. Please feel free to share some of your stories or tips with us. You can reach us at info@fathernaturelandscapes.com. Enjoy your reading.

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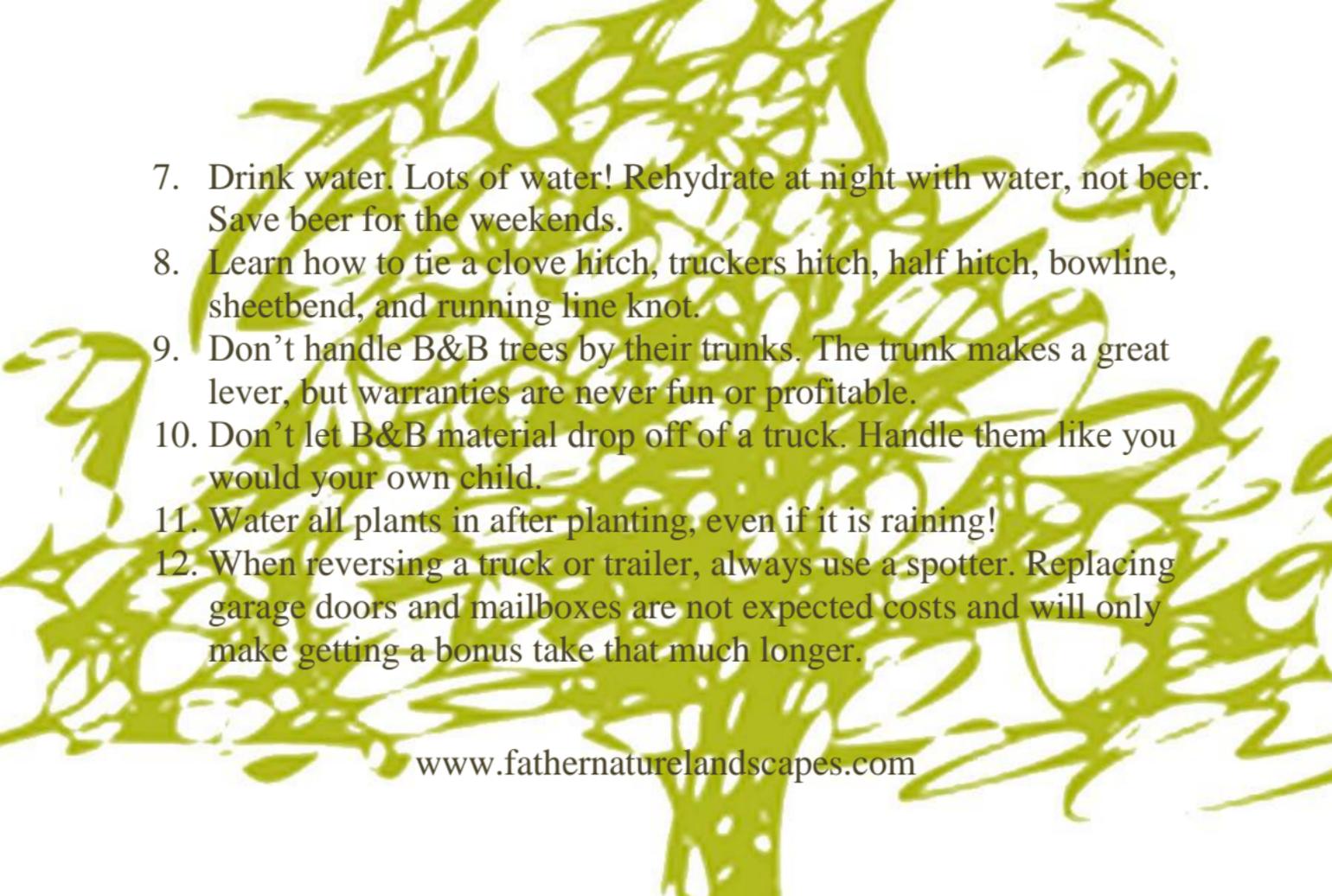


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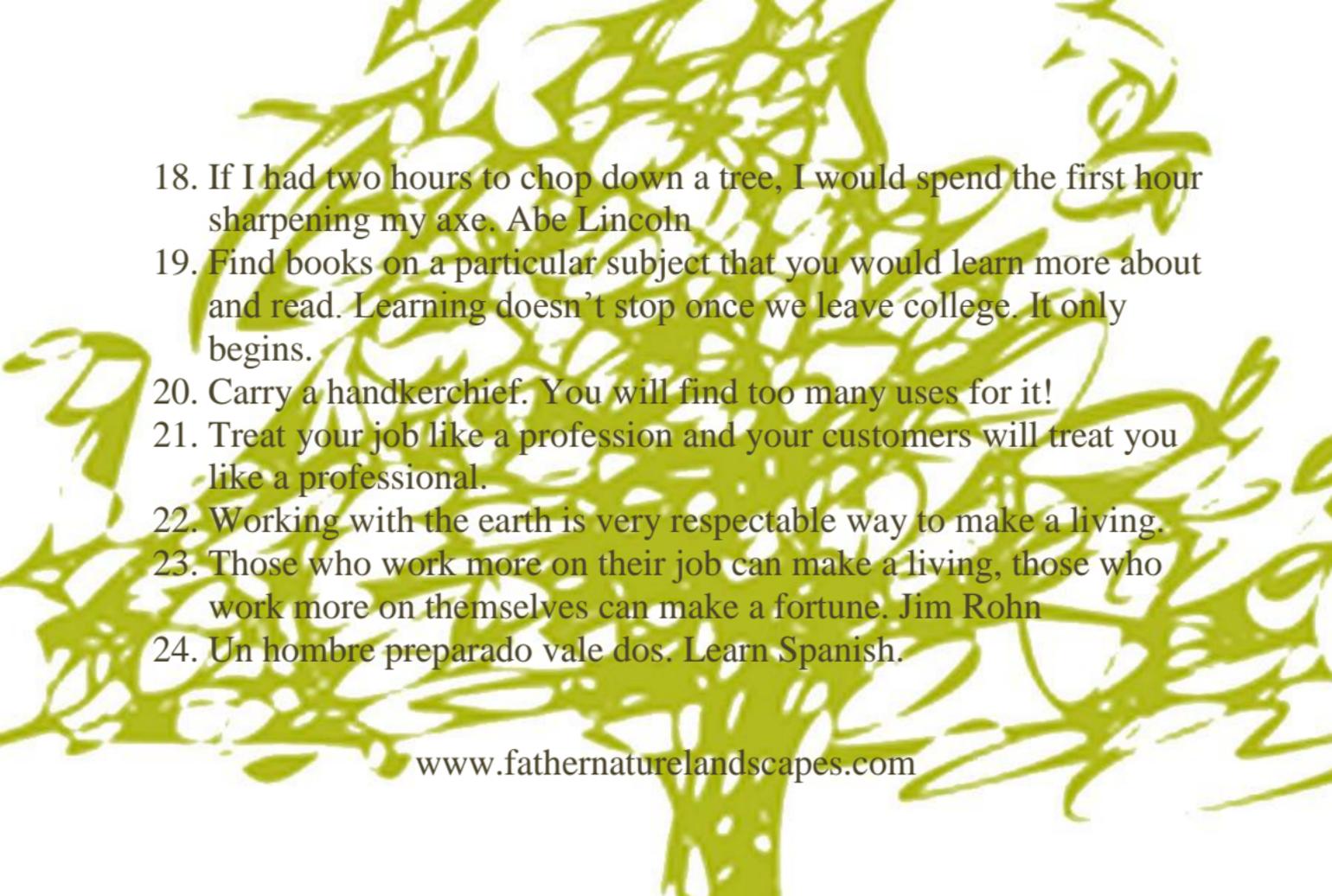
1. Learn how to use a transit. You will never regret getting your grade correct once you have to redo a drainage system.
2. Never stop learning. You learn more, you earn more!
3. Always carry index cards, a sharpie, a roll of electrical tape, and a sharp knife.
4. Wear sturdy boots. It's no fun having a bum toe.
5. Wear sturdy pants. Kneeling down will ruin light pants and sand in your socks is no fun.
6. Wear sunscreen and a large brimmed hat. We are given 1 skin to protect which will wear out prematurely without protection.

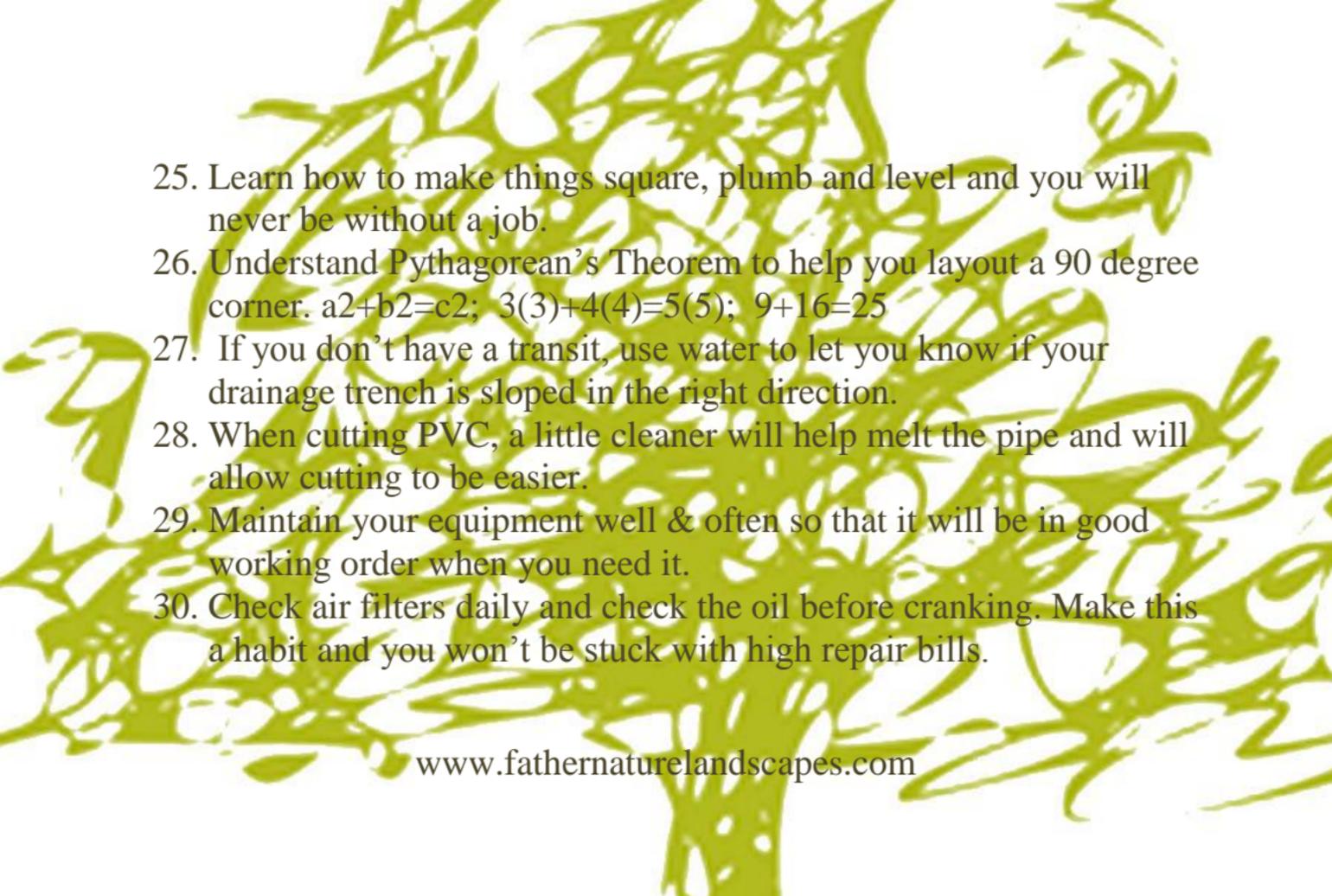
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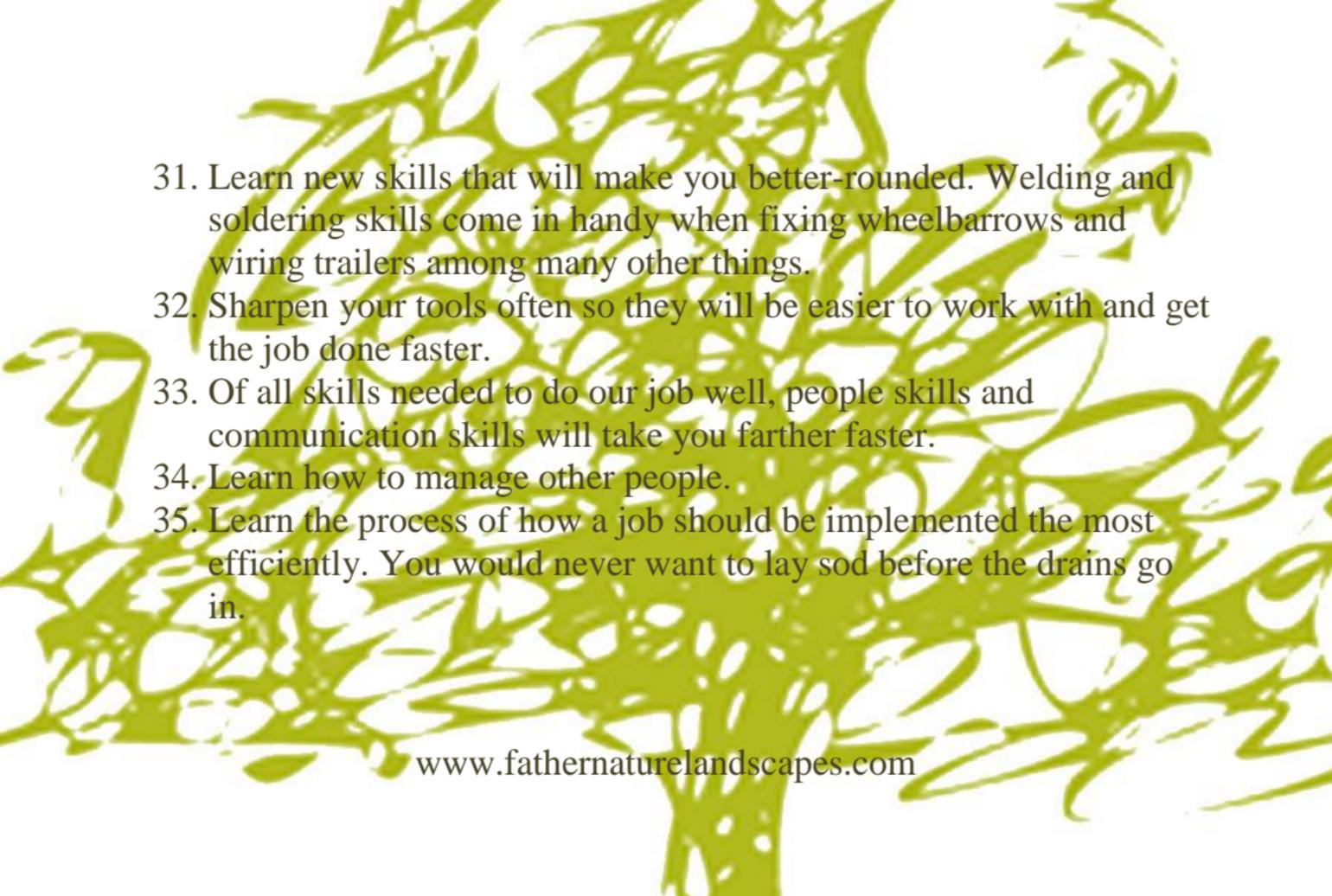
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7. Drink water. Lots of water! Rehydrate at night with water, not beer. Save beer for the weekends.
 8. Learn how to tie a clove hitch, truckers hitch, half hitch, bowline, sheetbend, and running line knot.
 9. Don't handle B&B trees by their trunks. The trunk makes a great lever, but warranties are never fun or profitable.
 10. Don't let B&B material drop off of a truck. Handle them like you would your own child.
 11. Water all plants in after planting, even if it is raining!
 12. When reversing a truck or trailer, always use a spotter. Replacing garage doors and mailboxes are not expected costs and will only make getting a bonus take that much longer.

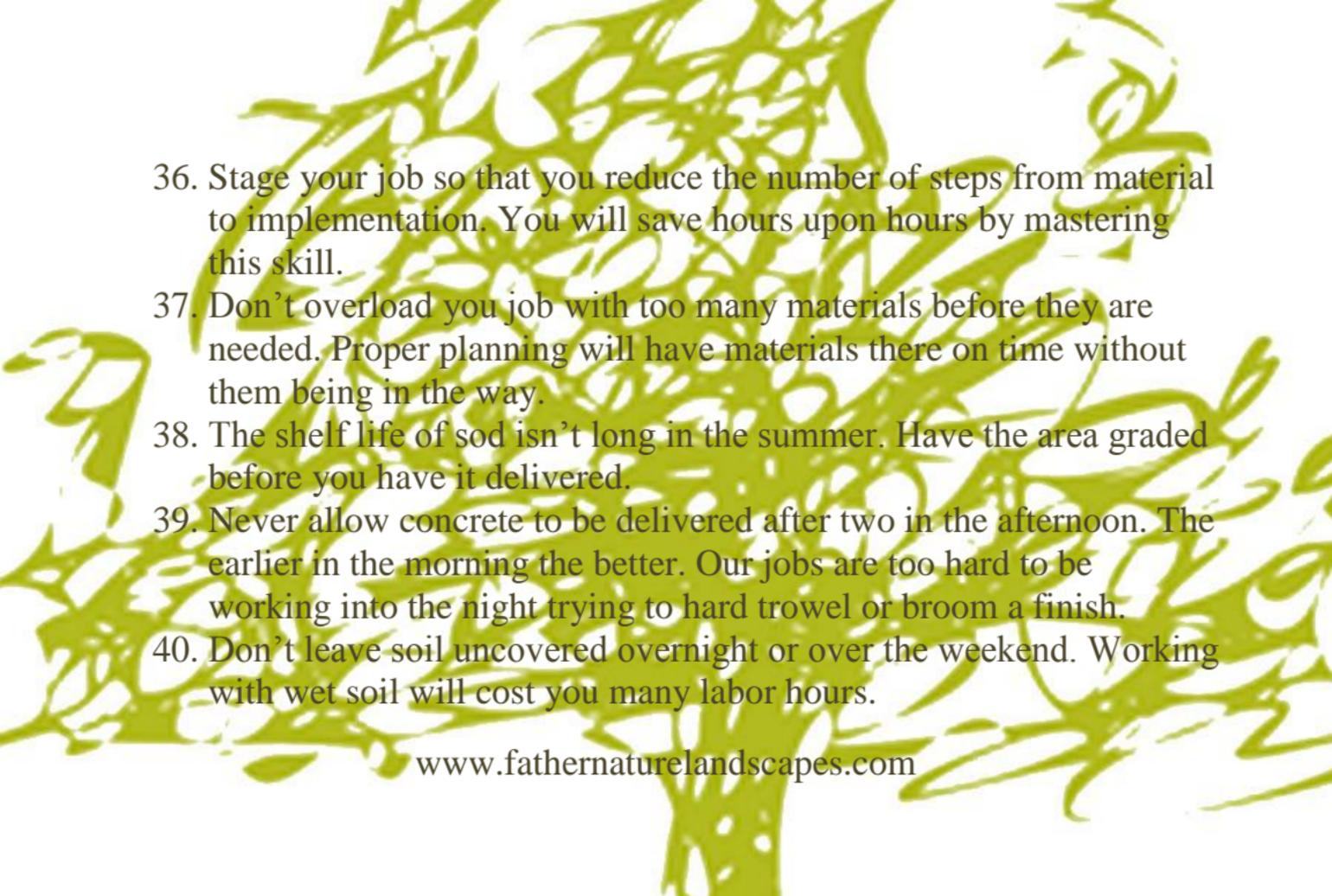
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13. Use your shovel as your measuring stick when planting plants or digging trenches. Taking this quick measurement will save time and effort.
 14. Every time before you take off with truck and trailer, do a walk about around the trailer to make sure all connections are secure, ball size matches hitch, and all tools and materials have been fastened.
 15. Take good job notes indicating the date, place, what happened, what was used & what is needed for tomorrow.
 16. A picture is worth a thousand words. Document drainage lines, irrigation lines, gas lines, etc. with a simple photo and email back to the office.
 17. Know what you are doing for the week so that you can plan. Luck seems to follow those who are properly prepared.

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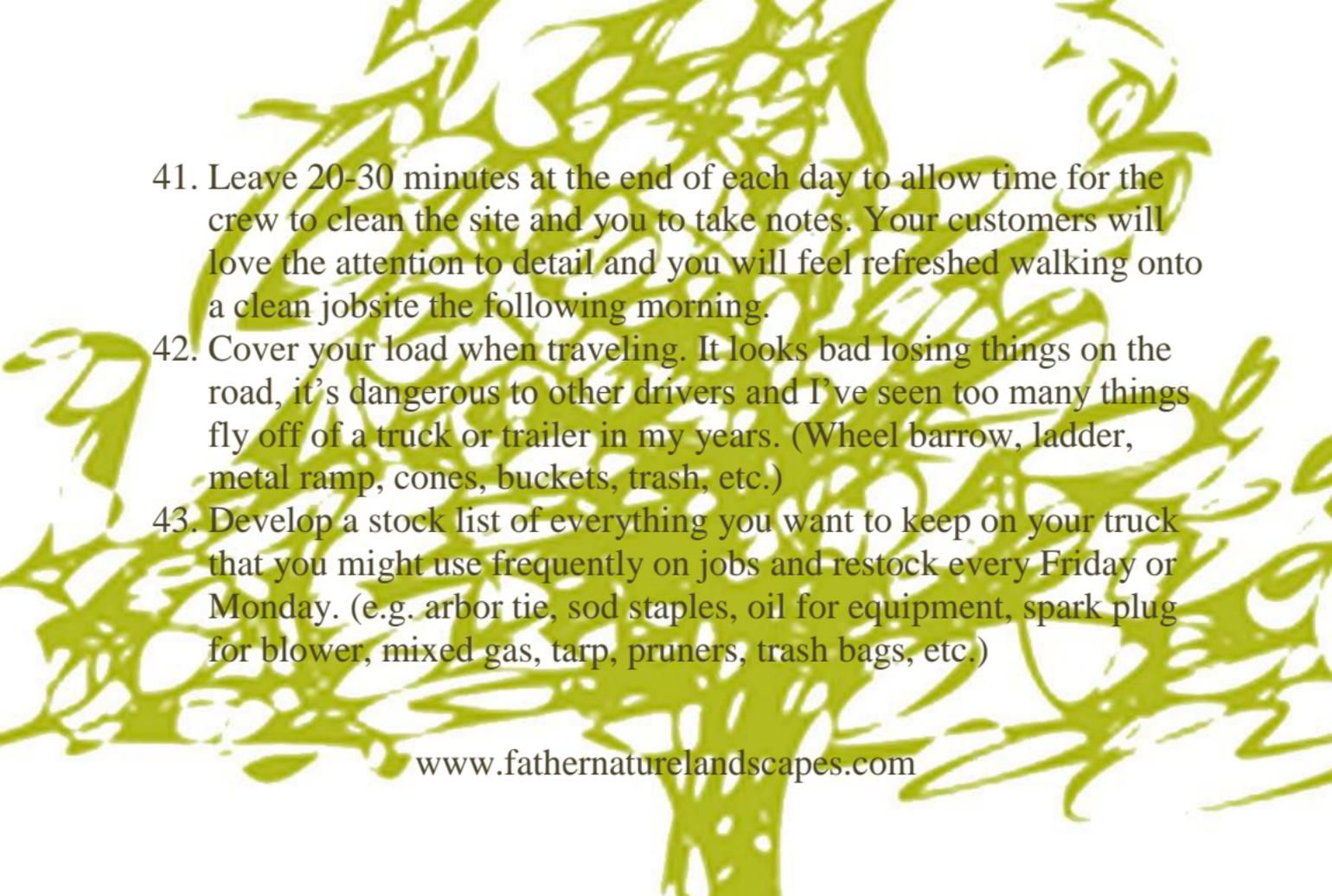
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18. If I had two hours to chop down a tree, I would spend the first hour sharpening my axe. Abe Lincoln
 19. Find books on a particular subject that you would learn more about and read. Learning doesn't stop once we leave college. It only begins.
 20. Carry a handkerchief. You will find too many uses for it!
 21. Treat your job like a profession and your customers will treat you like a professional.
 22. Working with the earth is very respectable way to make a living.
 23. Those who work more on their job can make a living, those who work more on themselves can make a fortune. Jim Rohn
 24. Un hombre preparado vale dos. Learn Spanish.

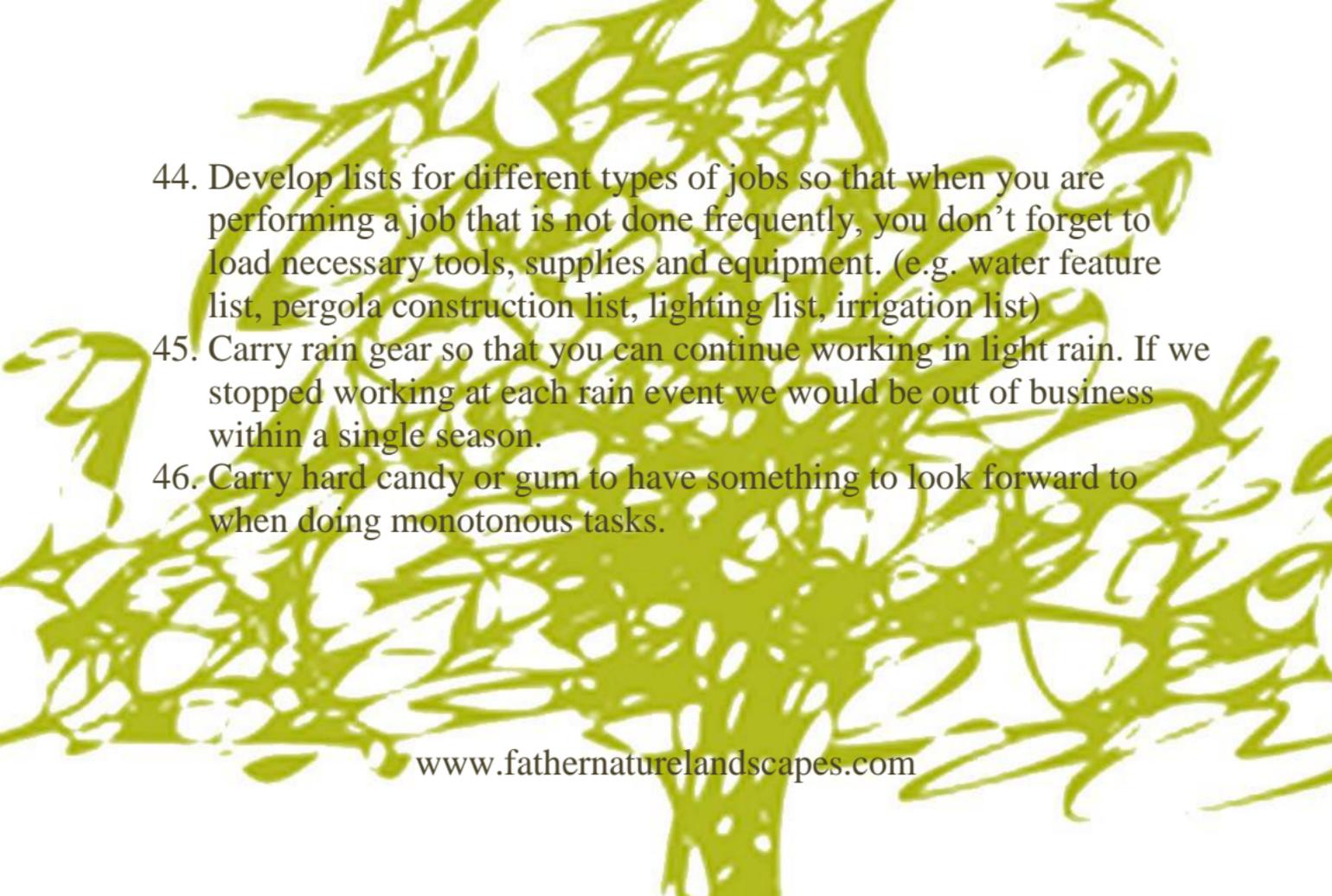
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25. Learn how to make things square, plumb and level and you will never be without a job.
 26. Understand Pythagorean's Theorem to help you layout a 90 degree corner. $a^2+b^2=c^2$; $3(3)+4(4)=5(5)$; $9+16=25$
 27. If you don't have a transit, use water to let you know if your drainage trench is sloped in the right direction.
 28. When cutting PVC, a little cleaner will help melt the pipe and will allow cutting to be easier.
 29. Maintain your equipment well & often so that it will be in good working order when you need it.
 30. Check air filters daily and check the oil before cranking. Make this a habit and you won't be stuck with high repair bills.

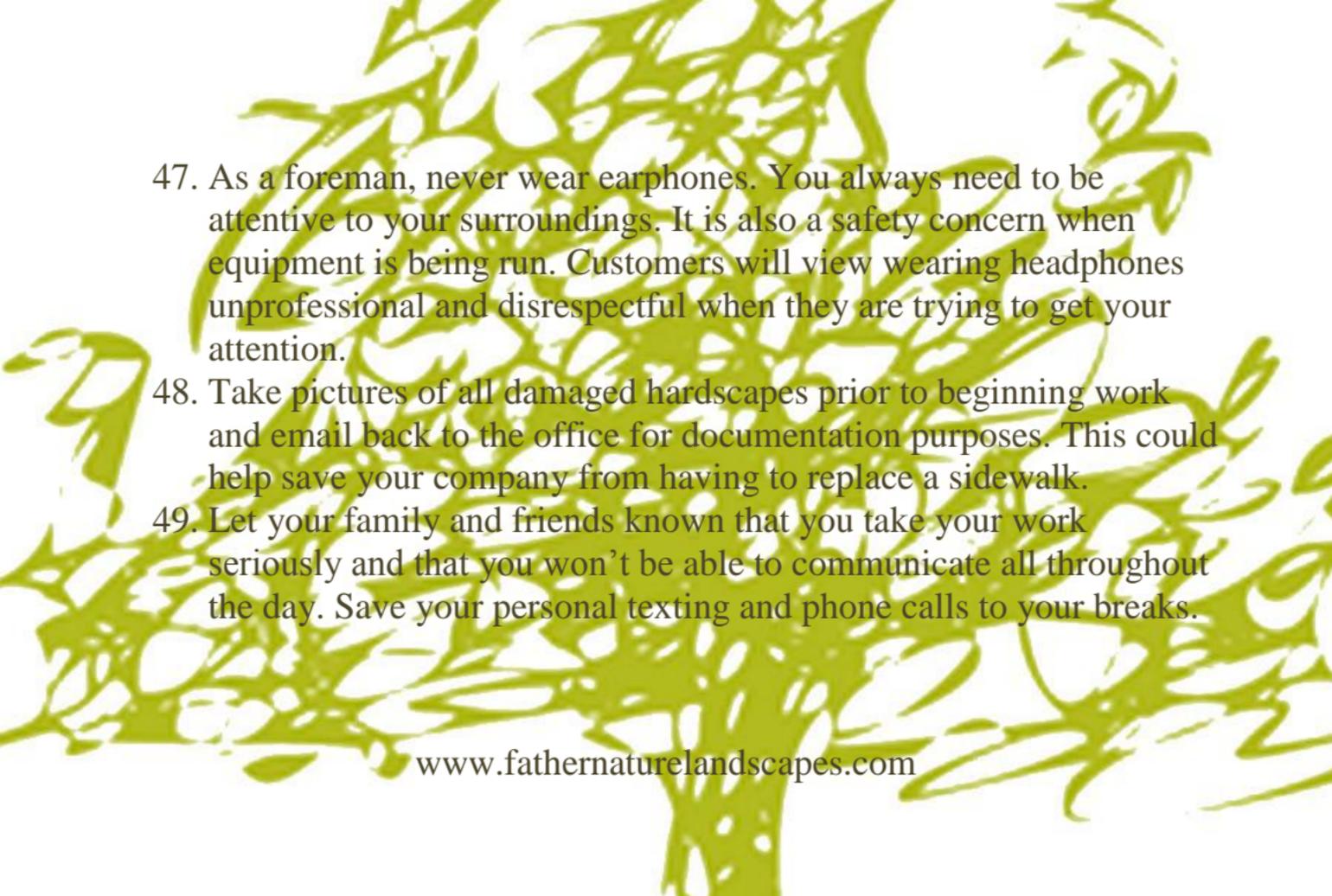
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31. Learn new skills that will make you better-rounded. Welding and soldering skills come in handy when fixing wheelbarrows and wiring trailers among many other things.
 32. Sharpen your tools often so they will be easier to work with and get the job done faster.
 33. Of all skills needed to do our job well, people skills and communication skills will take you farther faster.
 34. Learn how to manage other people.
 35. Learn the process of how a job should be implemented the most efficiently. You would never want to lay sod before the drains go in.

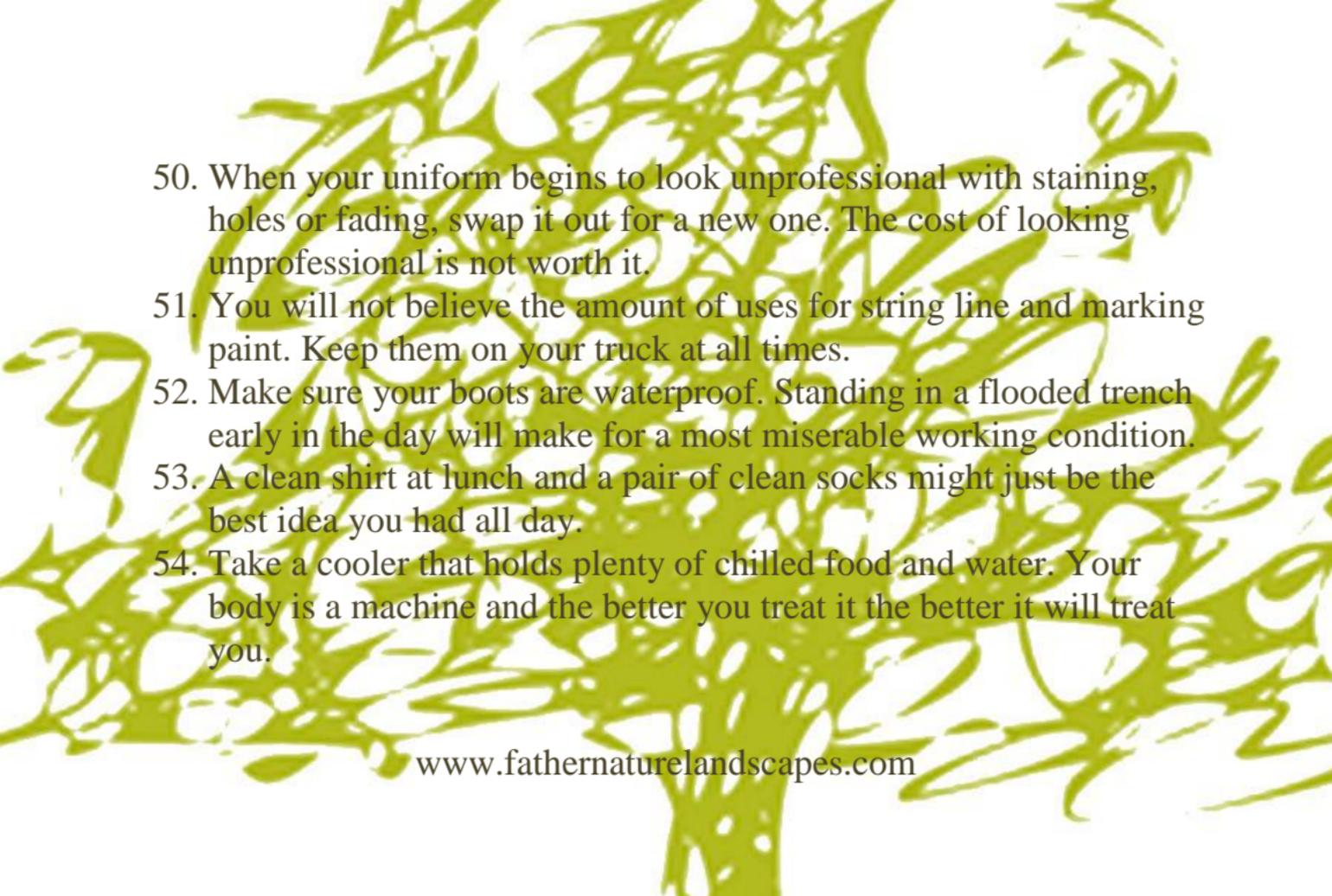
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36. Stage your job so that you reduce the number of steps from material to implementation. You will save hours upon hours by mastering this skill.
 37. Don't overload you job with too many materials before they are needed. Proper planning will have materials there on time without them being in the way.
 38. The shelf life of sod isn't long in the summer. Have the area graded before you have it delivered.
 39. Never allow concrete to be delivered after two in the afternoon. The earlier in the morning the better. Our jobs are too hard to be working into the night trying to hard trowel or broom a finish.
 40. Don't leave soil uncovered overnight or over the weekend. Working with wet soil will cost you many labor hours.

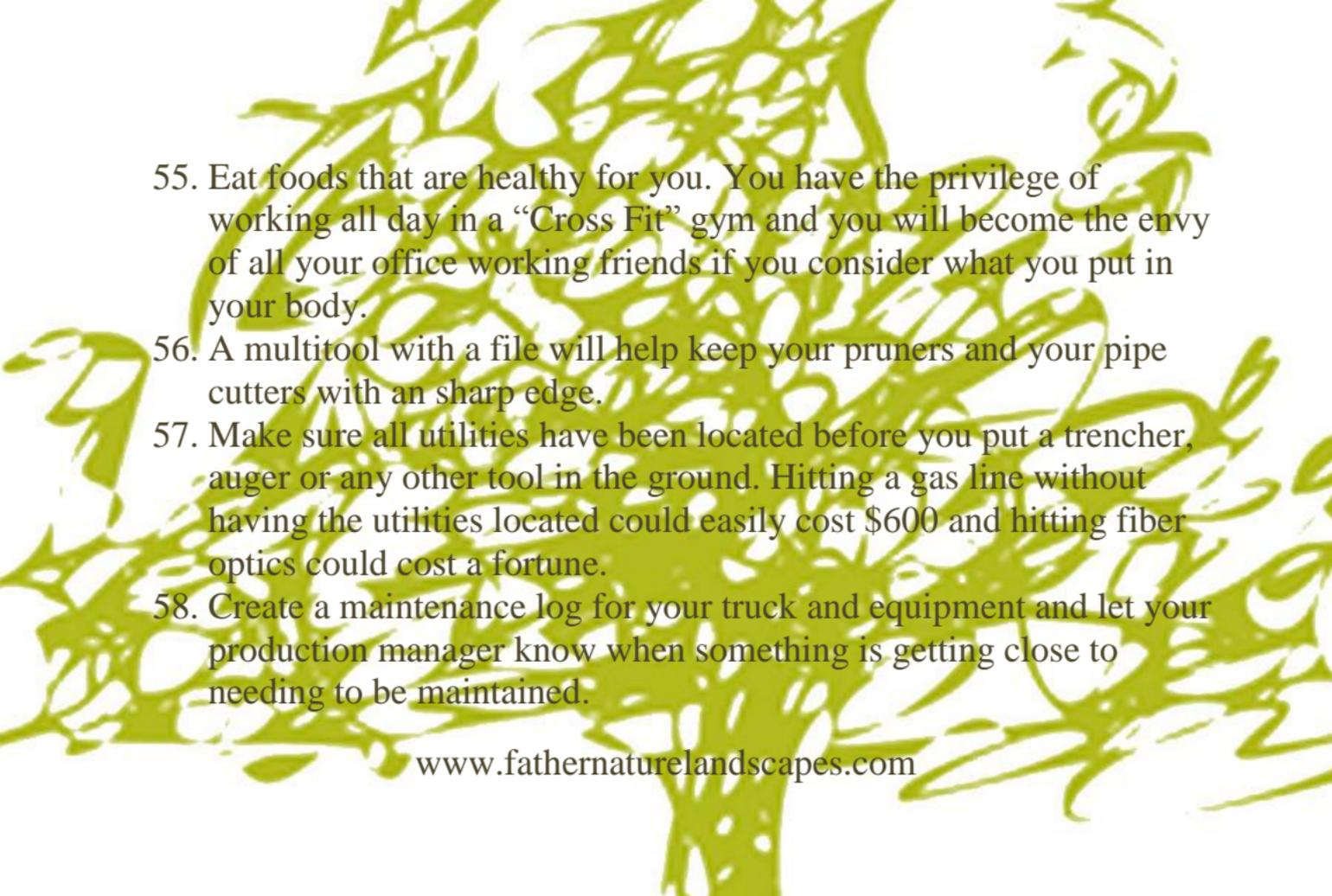
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41. Leave 20-30 minutes at the end of each day to allow time for the crew to clean the site and you to take notes. Your customers will love the attention to detail and you will feel refreshed walking onto a clean jobsite the following morning.
 42. Cover your load when traveling. It looks bad losing things on the road, it's dangerous to other drivers and I've seen too many things fly off of a truck or trailer in my years. (Wheel barrow, ladder, metal ramp, cones, buckets, trash, etc.)
 43. Develop a stock list of everything you want to keep on your truck that you might use frequently on jobs and restock every Friday or Monday. (e.g. arbor tie, sod staples, oil for equipment, spark plug for blower, mixed gas, tarp, pruners, trash bags, etc.)

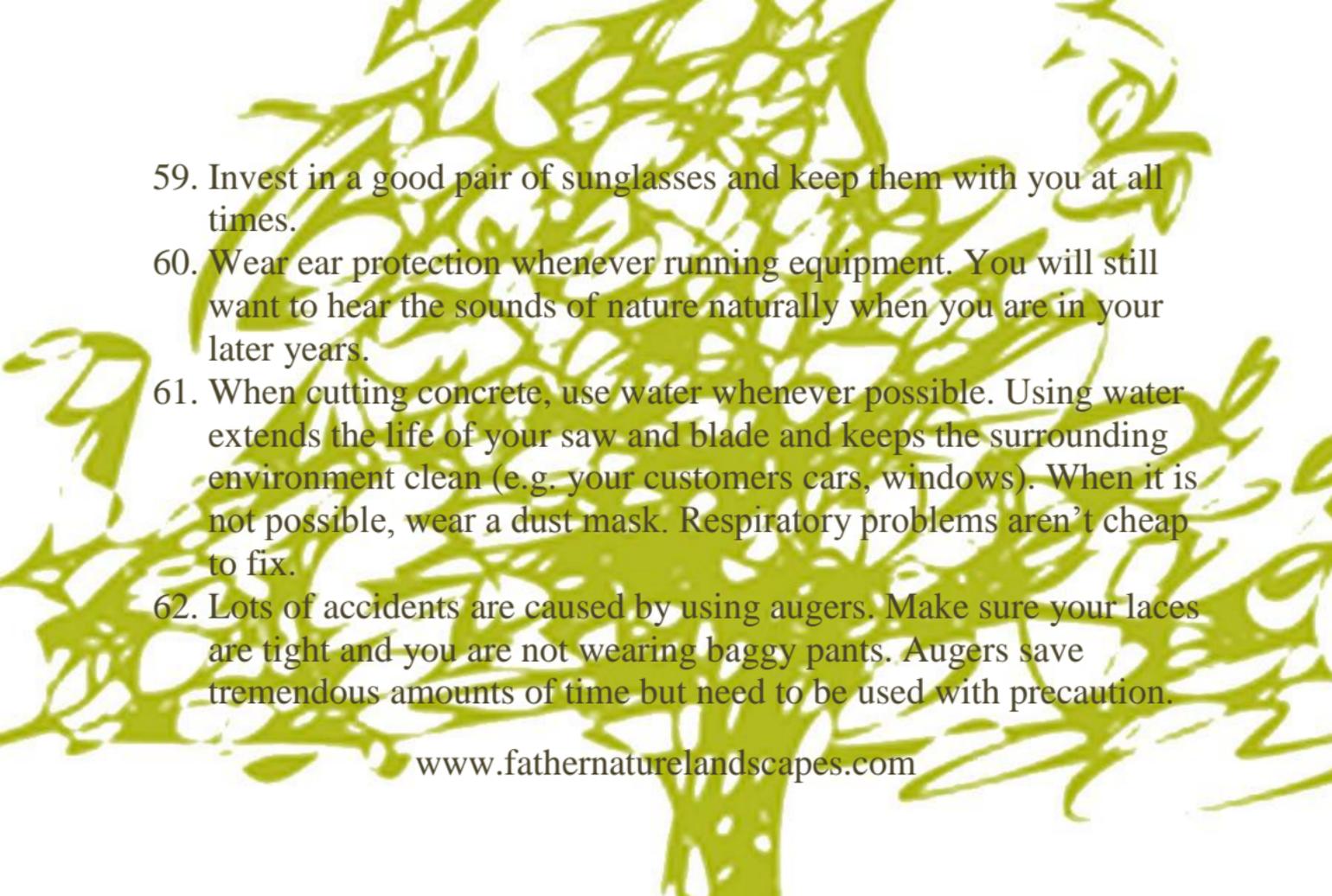
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44. Develop lists for different types of jobs so that when you are performing a job that is not done frequently, you don't forget to load necessary tools, supplies and equipment. (e.g. water feature list, pergola construction list, lighting list, irrigation list)
 45. Carry rain gear so that you can continue working in light rain. If we stopped working at each rain event we would be out of business within a single season.
 46. Carry hard candy or gum to have something to look forward to when doing monotonous tasks.

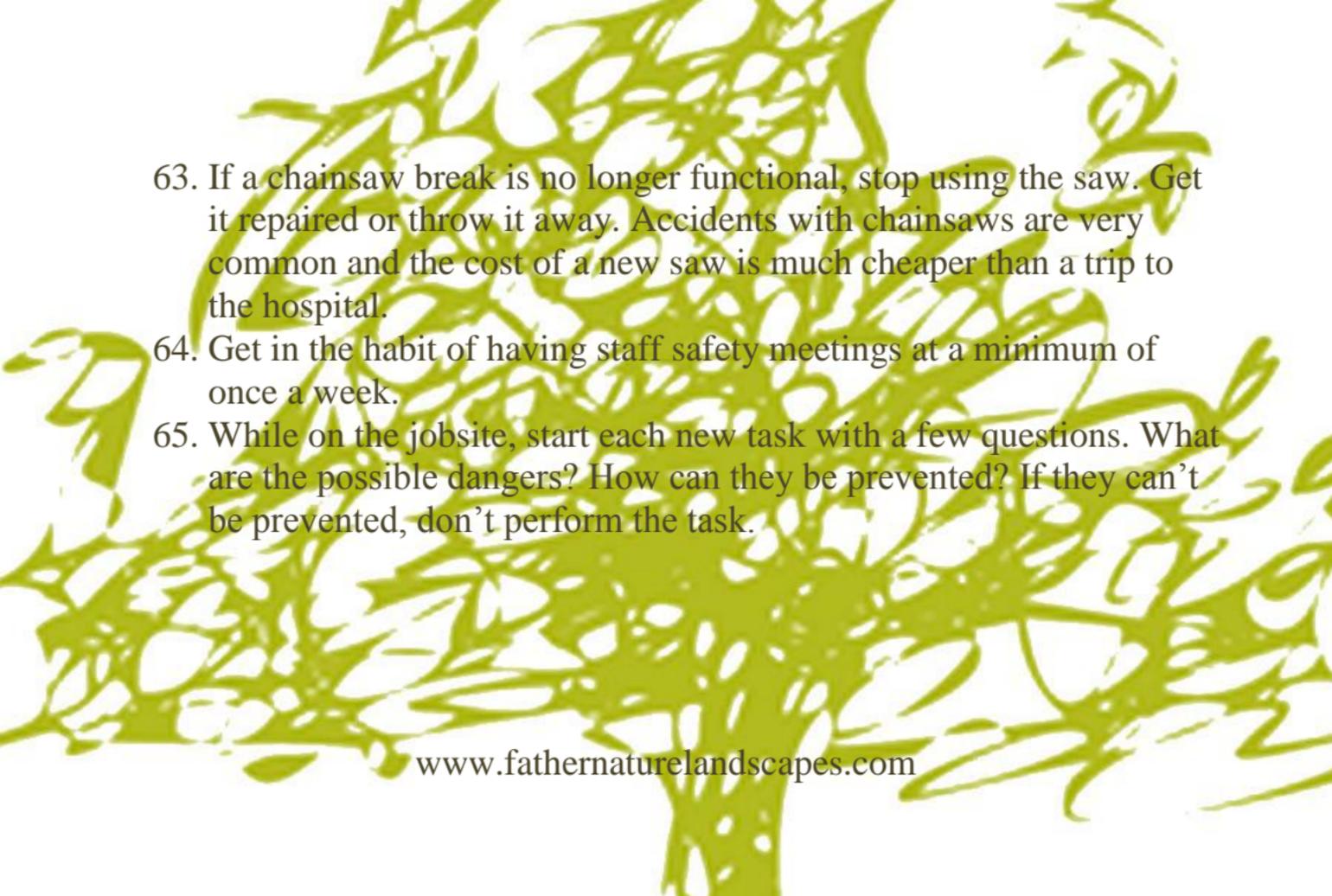
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47. As a foreman, never wear earphones. You always need to be attentive to your surroundings. It is also a safety concern when equipment is being run. Customers will view wearing headphones unprofessional and disrespectful when they are trying to get your attention.
 48. Take pictures of all damaged hardscapes prior to beginning work and email back to the office for documentation purposes. This could help save your company from having to replace a sidewalk.
 49. Let your family and friends know that you take your work seriously and that you won't be able to communicate all throughout the day. Save your personal texting and phone calls to your breaks.

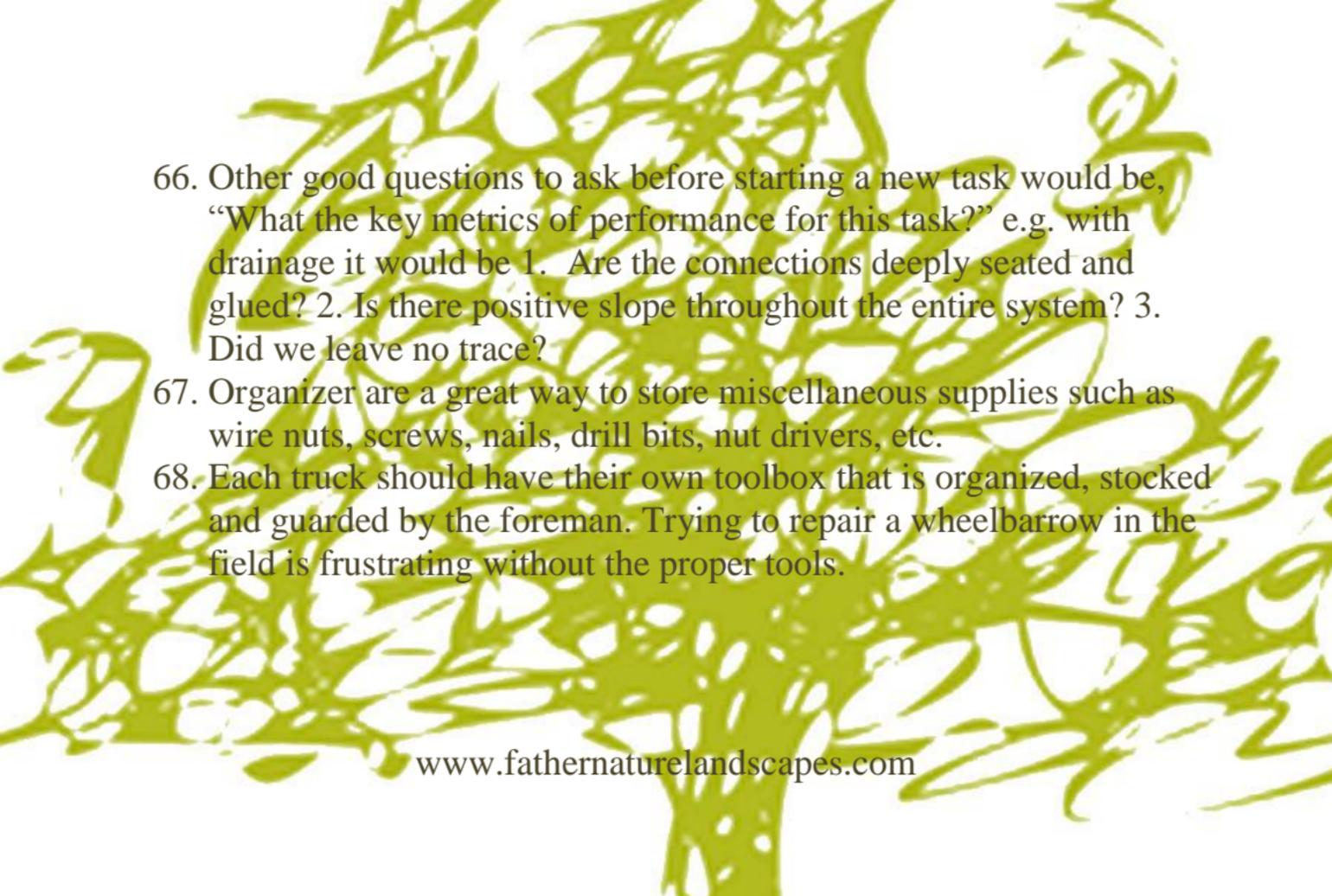
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50. When your uniform begins to look unprofessional with staining, holes or fading, swap it out for a new one. The cost of looking unprofessional is not worth it.
 51. You will not believe the amount of uses for string line and marking paint. Keep them on your truck at all times.
 52. Make sure your boots are waterproof. Standing in a flooded trench early in the day will make for a most miserable working condition.
 53. A clean shirt at lunch and a pair of clean socks might just be the best idea you had all day.
 54. Take a cooler that holds plenty of chilled food and water. Your body is a machine and the better you treat it the better it will treat you.

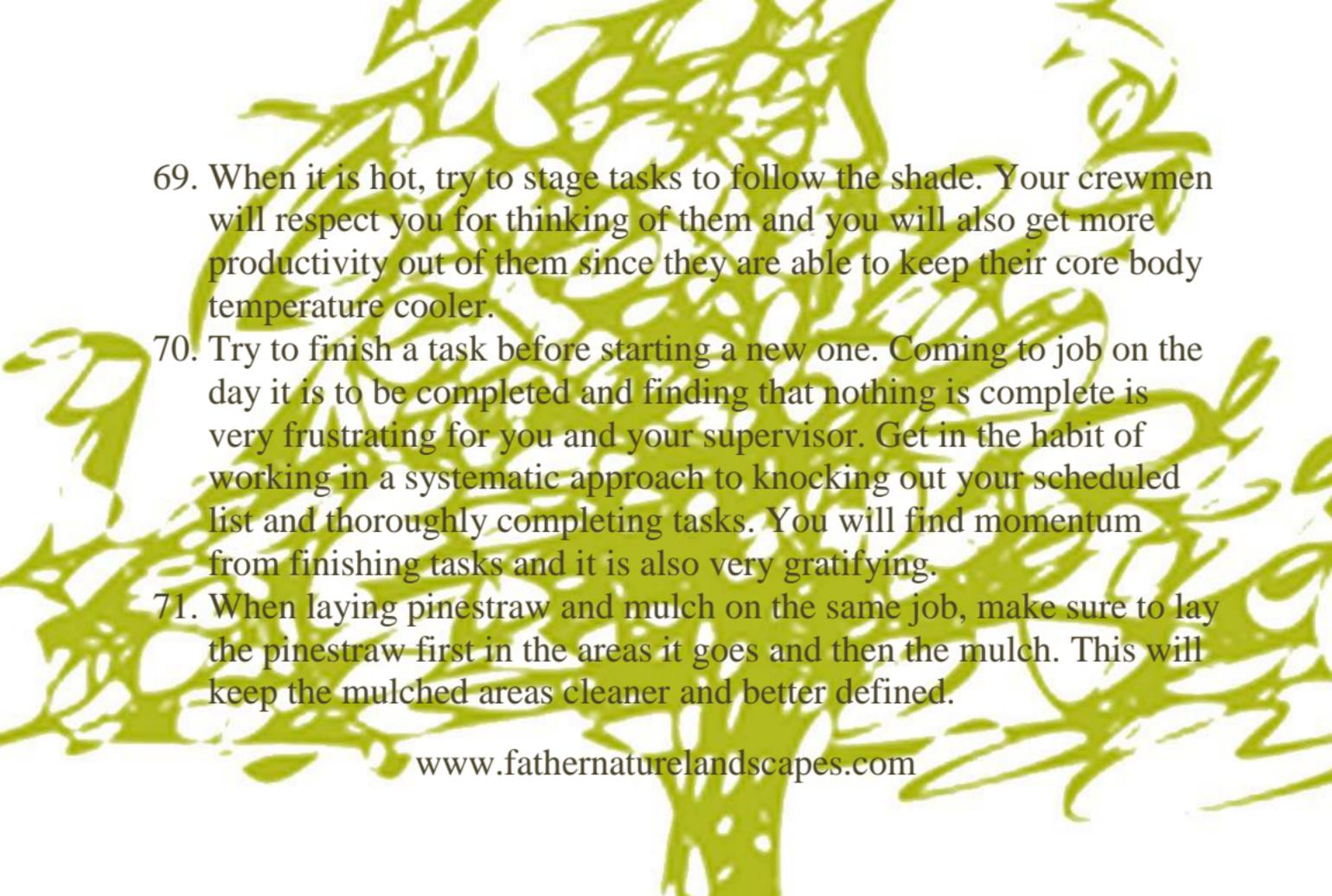
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55. Eat foods that are healthy for you. You have the privilege of working all day in a “Cross Fit” gym and you will become the envy of all your office working friends if you consider what you put in your body.
 56. A multitool with a file will help keep your pruners and your pipe cutters with an sharp edge.
 57. Make sure all utilities have been located before you put a trencher, auger or any other tool in the ground. Hitting a gas line without having the utilities located could easily cost \$600 and hitting fiber optics could cost a fortune.
 58. Create a maintenance log for your truck and equipment and let your production manager know when something is getting close to needing to be maintained.

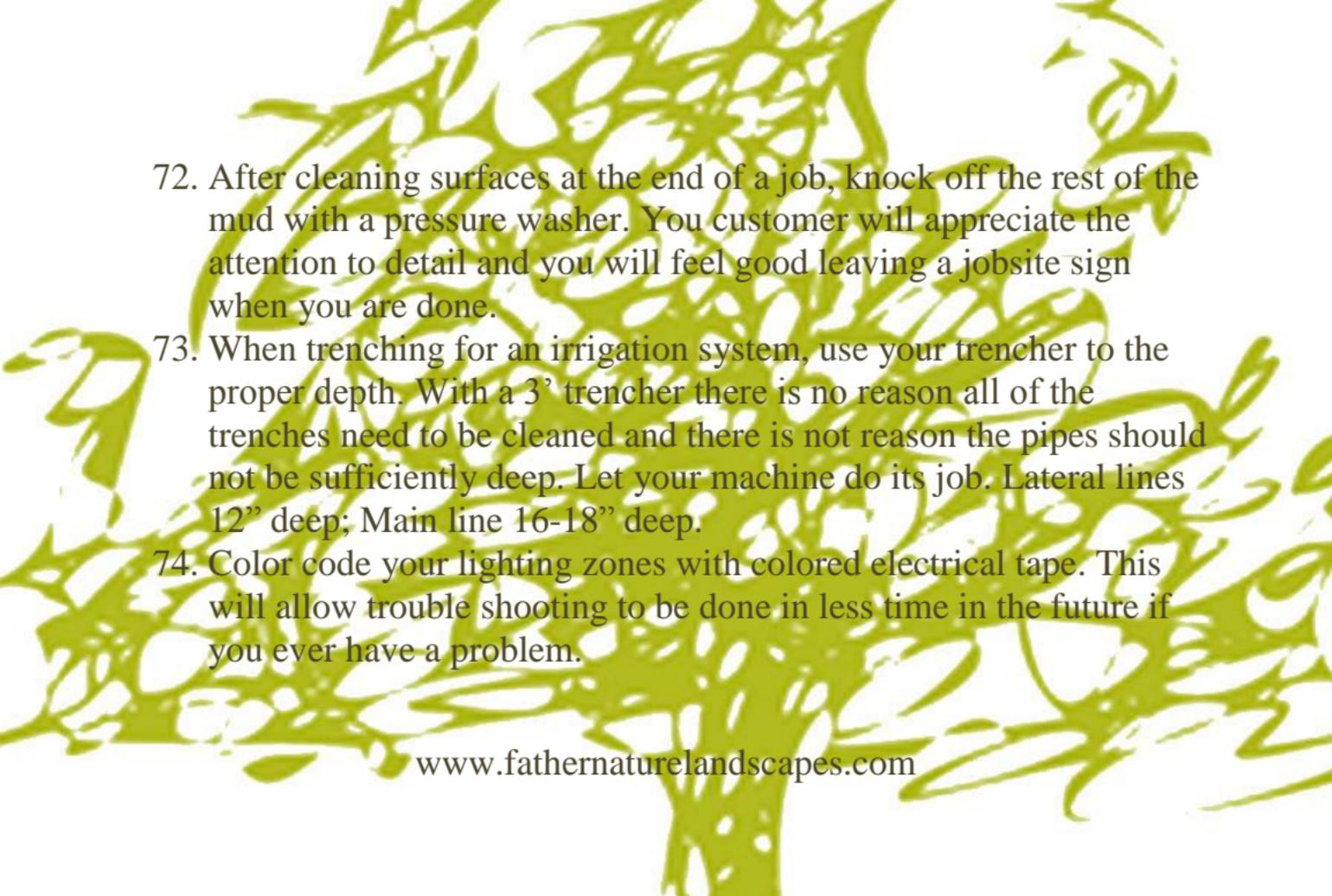
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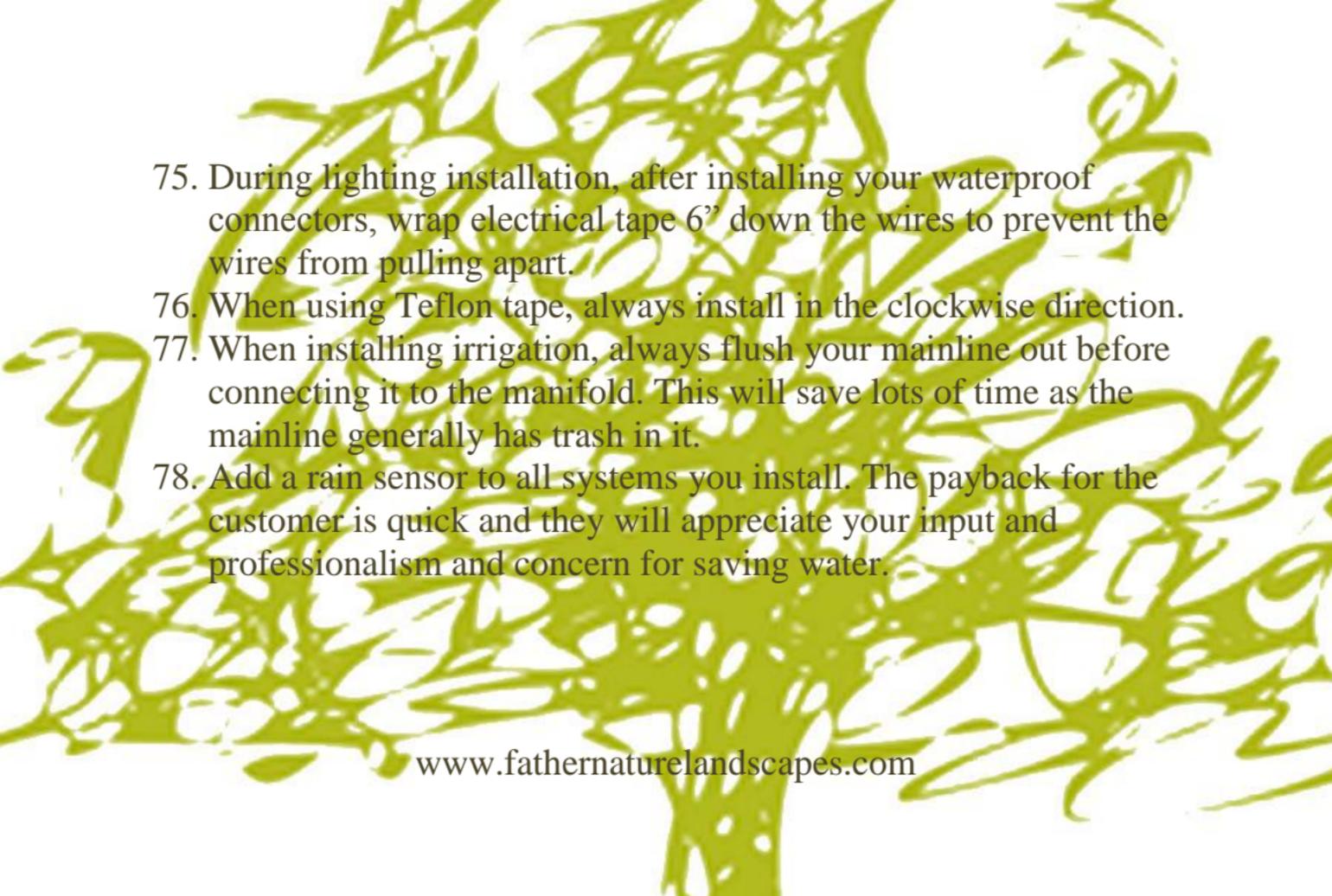
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59. Invest in a good pair of sunglasses and keep them with you at all times.
 60. Wear ear protection whenever running equipment. You will still want to hear the sounds of nature naturally when you are in your later years.
 61. When cutting concrete, use water whenever possible. Using water extends the life of your saw and blade and keeps the surrounding environment clean (e.g. your customers cars, windows). When it is not possible, wear a dust mask. Respiratory problems aren't cheap to fix.
 62. Lots of accidents are caused by using augers. Make sure your laces are tight and you are not wearing baggy pants. Augers save tremendous amounts of time but need to be used with precaution.

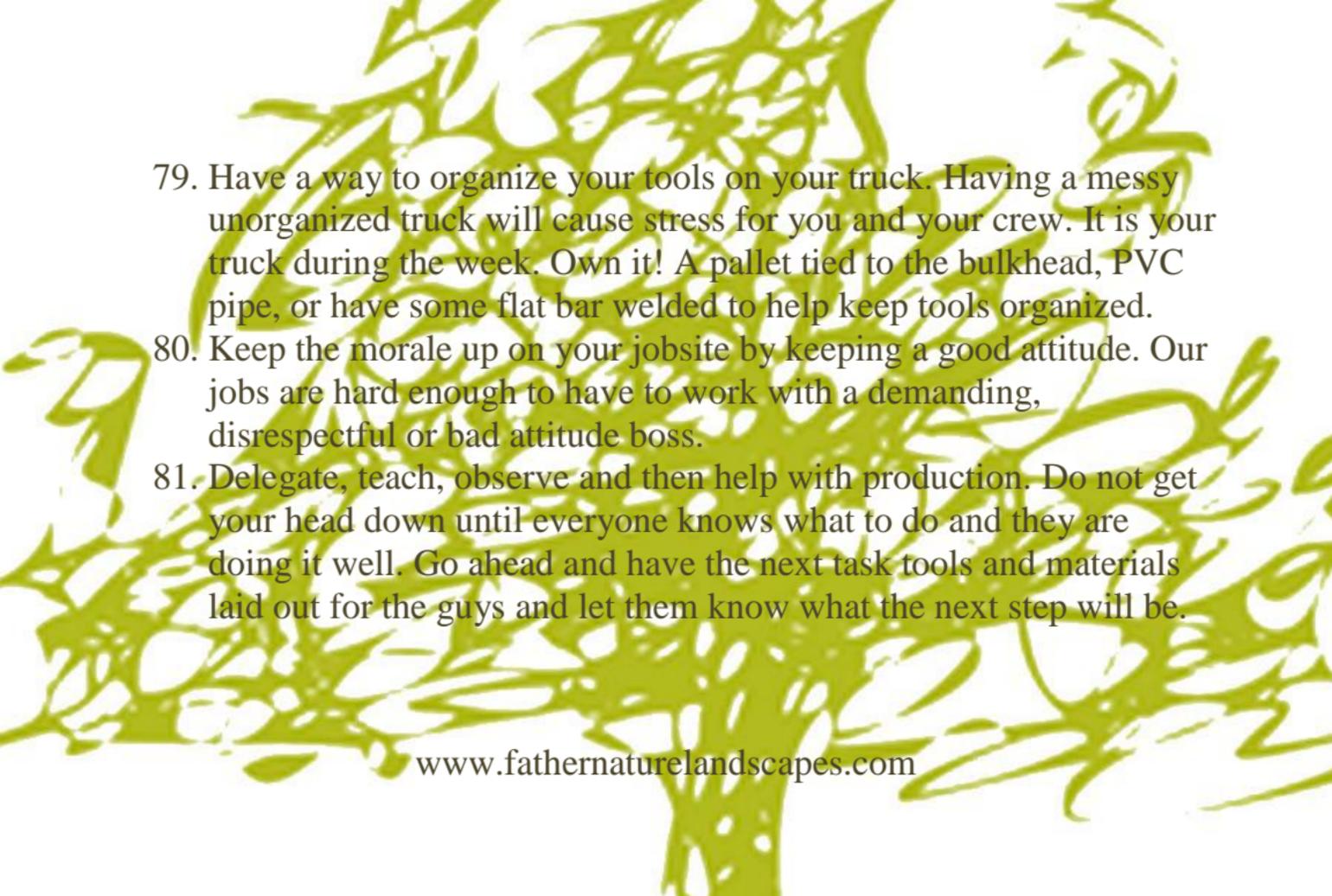
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63. If a chainsaw break is no longer functional, stop using the saw. Get it repaired or throw it away. Accidents with chainsaws are very common and the cost of a new saw is much cheaper than a trip to the hospital.
 64. Get in the habit of having staff safety meetings at a minimum of once a week.
 65. While on the jobsite, start each new task with a few questions. What are the possible dangers? How can they be prevented? If they can't be prevented, don't perform the task.

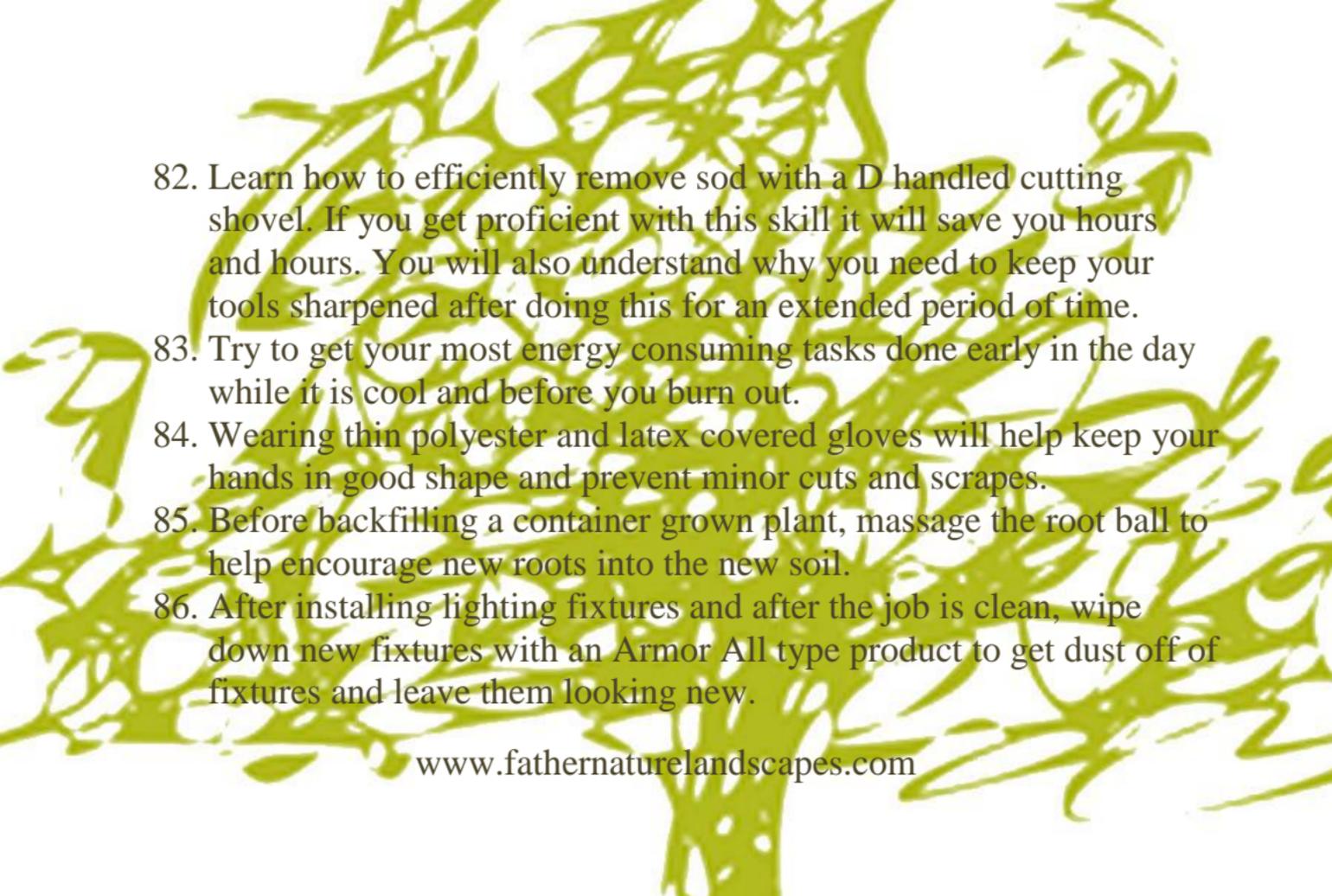
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66. Other good questions to ask before starting a new task would be, “What the key metrics of performance for this task?” e.g. with drainage it would be 1. Are the connections deeply seated and glued? 2. Is there positive slope throughout the entire system? 3. Did we leave no trace?
67. Organizer are a great way to store miscellaneous supplies such as wire nuts, screws, nails, drill bits, nut drivers, etc.
68. Each truck should have their own toolbox that is organized, stocked and guarded by the foreman. Trying to repair a wheelbarrow in the field is frustrating without the proper tools.

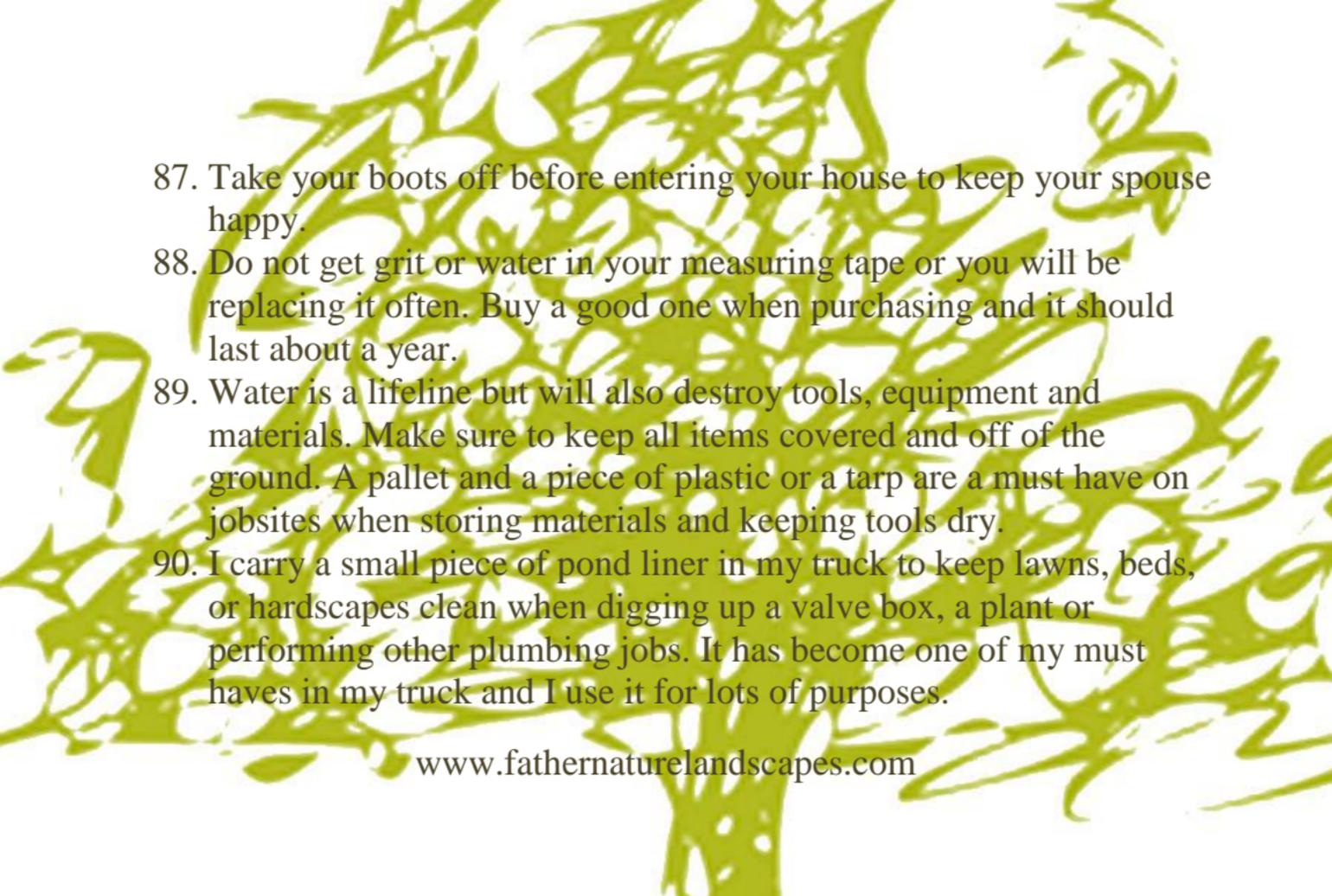
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69. When it is hot, try to stage tasks to follow the shade. Your crewmen will respect you for thinking of them and you will also get more productivity out of them since they are able to keep their core body temperature cooler.
70. Try to finish a task before starting a new one. Coming to job on the day it is to be completed and finding that nothing is complete is very frustrating for you and your supervisor. Get in the habit of working in a systematic approach to knocking out your scheduled list and thoroughly completing tasks. You will find momentum from finishing tasks and it is also very gratifying.
71. When laying pinestraw and mulch on the same job, make sure to lay the pinestraw first in the areas it goes and then the mulch. This will keep the mulched areas cleaner and better defined.

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72. After cleaning surfaces at the end of a job, knock off the rest of the mud with a pressure washer. Your customer will appreciate the attention to detail and you will feel good leaving a jobsite sign when you are done.
73. When trenching for an irrigation system, use your trencher to the proper depth. With a 3' trencher there is no reason all of the trenches need to be cleaned and there is no reason the pipes should not be sufficiently deep. Let your machine do its job. Lateral lines 12" deep; Main line 16-18" deep.
74. Color code your lighting zones with colored electrical tape. This will allow trouble shooting to be done in less time in the future if you ever have a problem.

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75. During lighting installation, after installing your waterproof connectors, wrap electrical tape 6" down the wires to prevent the wires from pulling apart.
 76. When using Teflon tape, always install in the clockwise direction.
 77. When installing irrigation, always flush your mainline out before connecting it to the manifold. This will save lots of time as the mainline generally has trash in it.
 78. Add a rain sensor to all systems you install. The payback for the customer is quick and they will appreciate your input and professionalism and concern for saving water.

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79. Have a way to organize your tools on your truck. Having a messy unorganized truck will cause stress for you and your crew. It is your truck during the week. Own it! A pallet tied to the bulkhead, PVC pipe, or have some flat bar welded to help keep tools organized.
 80. Keep the morale up on your jobsite by keeping a good attitude. Our jobs are hard enough to have to work with a demanding, disrespectful or bad attitude boss.
 81. Delegate, teach, observe and then help with production. Do not get your head down until everyone knows what to do and they are doing it well. Go ahead and have the next task tools and materials laid out for the guys and let them know what the next step will be.

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82. Learn how to efficiently remove sod with a D handled cutting shovel. If you get proficient with this skill it will save you hours and hours. You will also understand why you need to keep your tools sharpened after doing this for an extended period of time.
 83. Try to get your most energy consuming tasks done early in the day while it is cool and before you burn out.
 84. Wearing thin polyester and latex covered gloves will help keep your hands in good shape and prevent minor cuts and scrapes.
 85. Before backfilling a container grown plant, massage the root ball to help encourage new roots into the new soil.
 86. After installing lighting fixtures and after the job is clean, wipe down new fixtures with an Armor All type product to get dust off of fixtures and leave them looking new.

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87. Take your boots off before entering your house to keep your spouse happy.
 88. Do not get grit or water in your measuring tape or you will be replacing it often. Buy a good one when purchasing and it should last about a year.
 89. Water is a lifeline but will also destroy tools, equipment and materials. Make sure to keep all items covered and off of the ground. A pallet and a piece of plastic or a tarp are a must have on jobsites when storing materials and keeping tools dry.
 90. I carry a small piece of pond liner in my truck to keep lawns, beds, or hardscapes clean when digging up a valve box, a plant or performing other plumbing jobs. It has become one of my must haves in my truck and I use it for lots of purposes.

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91. Keeping a watch with a timer will help you get into the habit of watching the clock to see how long it takes to perform tasks. The estimator in the office will love you for this. It will also help with better job costing. Every hour on the hour get in the habit of logging in to your job sheet to record what has happened.

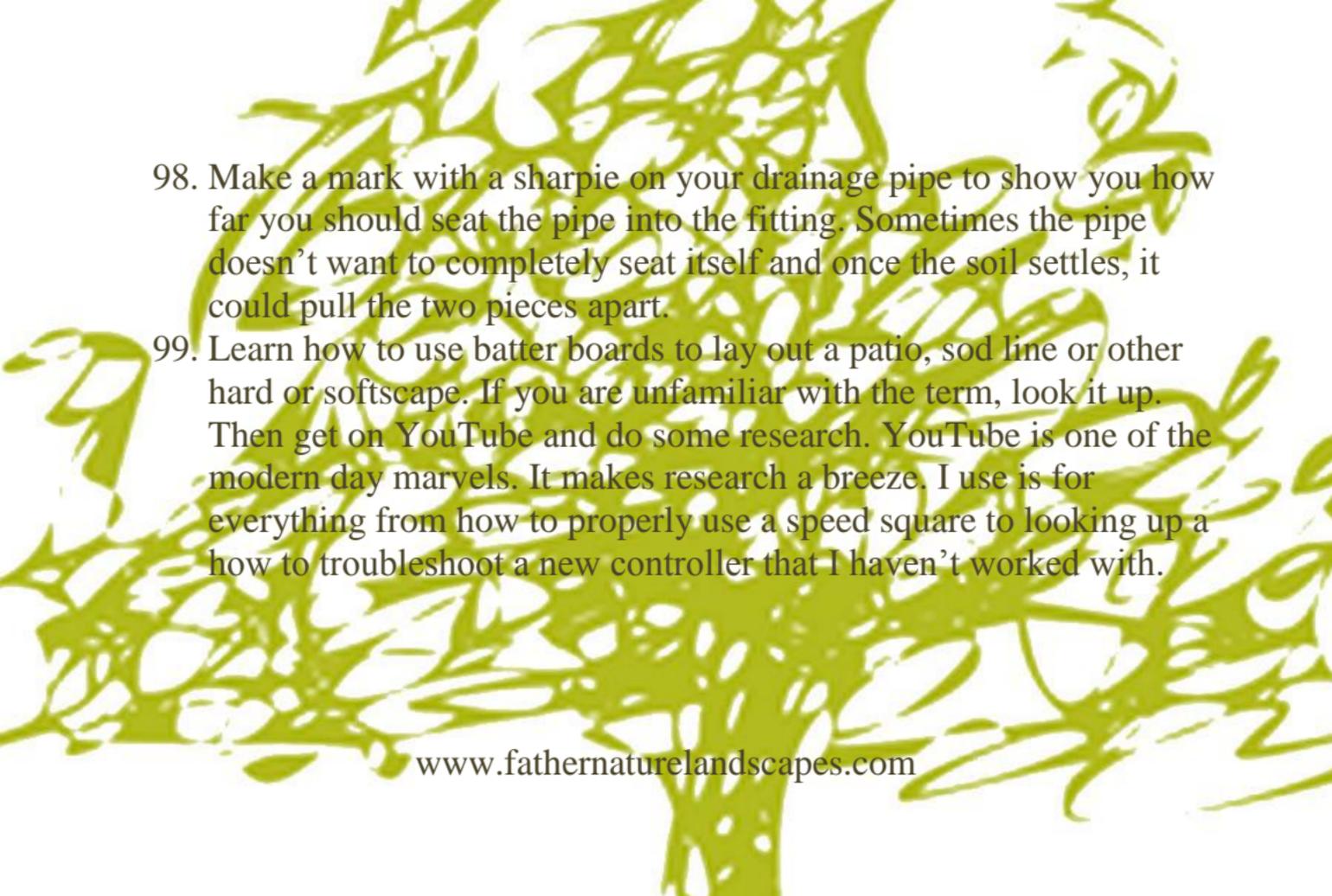
“What can be measured can be improved” Author unknown

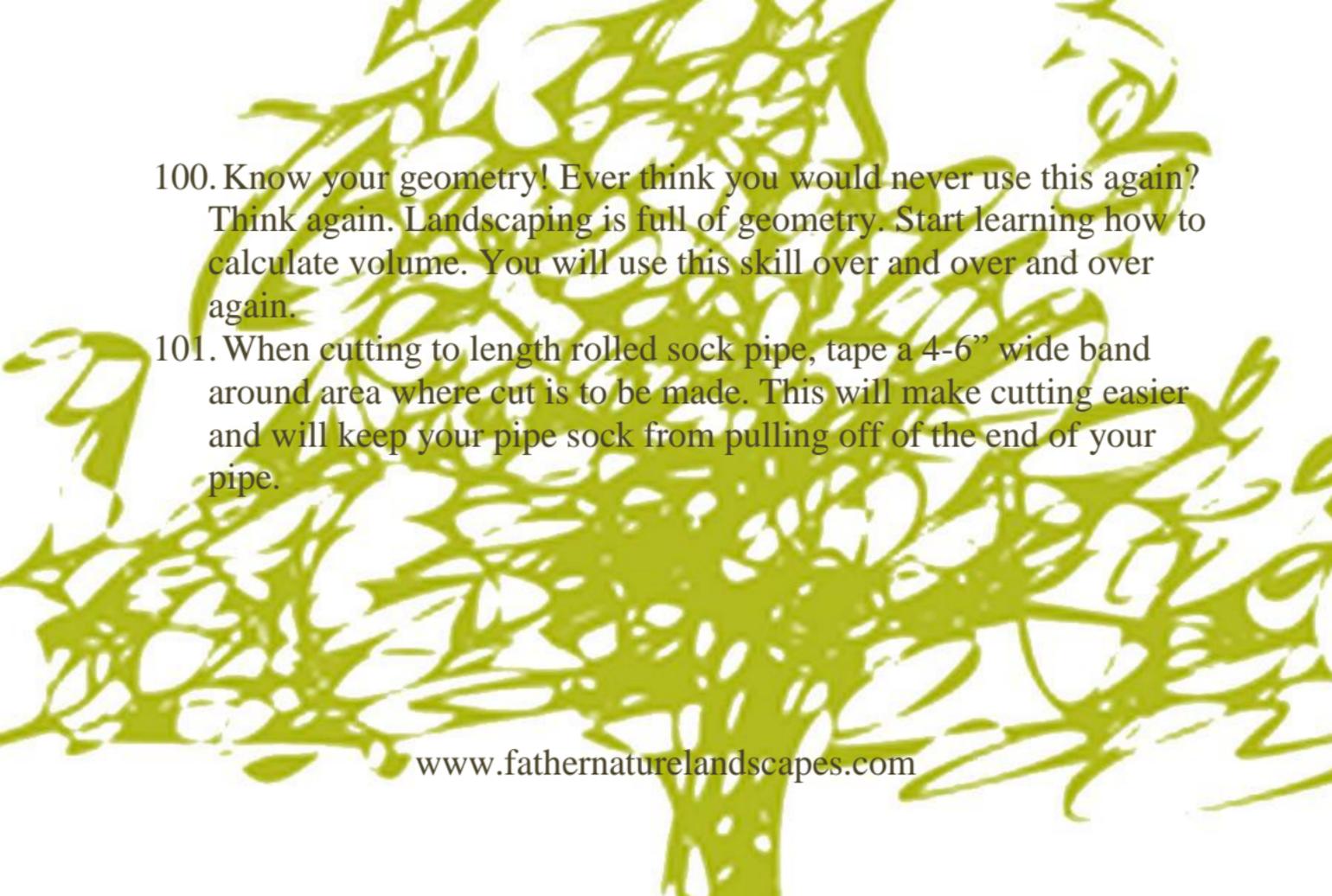
92. A powered up cordless drill will become your friend. I don't leave home without it. You will find it helpful for rehangng fence panels, tightening up a gate, hanging transformers, irrigation controllers, etc.

93. Learn how to use a volt/amp meter. This device is invaluable when it comes to troubleshooting irrigation and lighting issues. Google search rainbird's irrigation troubleshooting guide and read it.

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94. Continue growing your list of certifications. Become a licensed landscaper in your state by taking the necessary tests.
 95. Getting ICPI certified will help you have a broader knowledge of paver installation and other hardscape applications.
 96. Learn to be more effective by working in your circle of influence. As you do your circle of influence will enlarge and you will be more influential. This is one of Steven Covey's 7 Habits.
 97. Begin with the end in mind. This is another one of Steven Covey's 7 Habits and can be very useful in landscaping. By knowing what the end product will be, you will save countless hours of undoing what you have already done by knowing what the final outcome will be.

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98. Make a mark with a sharpie on your drainage pipe to show you how far you should seat the pipe into the fitting. Sometimes the pipe doesn't want to completely seat itself and once the soil settles, it could pull the two pieces apart.
99. Learn how to use batter boards to lay out a patio, sod line or other hard or softscape. If you are unfamiliar with the term, look it up. Then get on YouTube and do some research. YouTube is one of the modern day marvels. It makes research a breeze. I use it for everything from how to properly use a speed square to looking up a how to troubleshoot a new controller that I haven't worked with.

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100. Know your geometry! Ever think you would never use this again? Think again. Landscaping is full of geometry. Start learning how to calculate volume. You will use this skill over and over and over again.
101. When cutting to length rolled sock pipe, tape a 4-6" wide band around area where cut is to be made. This will make cutting easier and will keep your pipe sock from pulling off of the end of your pipe.



Notes:

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