

TELEVISION

Lawn and Order digs up laughs

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Better chain down those pink flamingos.

If you have some on your lawn, the local pranksters might just get a few ideas from watching a new documentary.

Lawn and Order, making its television premiere on CBC's Witness series, takes a look at North American homeowners' tastes in landscaping, and in passing recounts how a few outraged observers have been moved to flamingo-napping (and gnome-napping).

This is one of the funniest documentaries to come along in quite a while, perhaps the best since the Australian classic Cane Toads, of it which it reminds me in some ways.

The film opens with a drought-ravaged lawn being spray-painted green in what seems to be a Los Angeles neighborhood (obviously a pre-earthquake concern), then moves on to a game of croquet on the grounds of a mansion.

Some featured properties take lawn cultivation to extremes, while others are left as jungle, to the disgust of neighbors.

One old gent's land is a rest home for old scarecrows while another is a neo-classical



WITNESS: LAWN AND ORDER, 10 p.m. Monday on Ch. 6-8-9.

tribute to a southern Italian homeland.

Plaster or concrete gnomes, lawn jockeys, squirrels with nuts and fountains abound in this tightly edited, nicely scripted film that pokes fun at common values while seemingly celebrating them. Clever camera angles maintain the whimsical mood, and the background music is perfect.

One of the better moments is a secretive interview, filmed in shadow, with an "aesthetic terrorist" — a young man who admits to organizing late-night thefts of lawn ornaments that didn't meet his cultural standards. One of the raids is re-enacted

in true Crime Stoppers fashion.

Filmmakers Janis Lundman and Adrienne Mitchell walked, cycled and drove down Toronto streets for months gathering examples, then expanded the search to the United States, where they found suburbanites much more willing to discuss their property than Canadians were. They place ads in local newspapers looking for compelling lawn stories, and even hired a law firm to search for legal disputes involving cultivation of property.

My favorite interview is with the guy who spends four hours every night, seven days a week, caring for his lawn. His wife can't understand why. There's another story there somewhere.

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