

Home Horticulture from the Ground Up . . .

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Introduction

So you are thinking about landscaping or perhaps redoing an existing landscape around your home. You are not alone. In 2001, 22 million homeowners spent \$18.7 million on professional landscape, tree, and lawn care services, and 85 million homeowners spent \$37.7 billion to buy everything from pansies to fish from garden centers and nurseries.

Landscaping is not the simple act of planting trees, shrubs, and flowers. Landscaping is planning and designing for the best use of available space around your home. Designing a landscape is an art that involves not only plants, homes and people, but also fences, patios, decks, walkways, etc.

Developing the Plan

Where do you start? It is desirable to decide what type of landscape you like. You can begin by becoming more knowledgeable about landscaping principles. Your own books, libraries, and the Internet will provide excellent information. Begin collecting magazine photos, visit new housing developments, and take photos of landscapes during your travels.

Another decision you will need to make is whether to contract with a professional landscape planner or do the project yourself. There are advantages and disadvantages with either decision.

Landscape Factors

The initial stage of developing your landscape plan is deciding how the “space” will be used. What are your family’s needs? Generally, there are four or five use areas, including the public area (usually the front view of the house); living or private areas for family use, leisure activities, entertaining, dining, etc.; recreation or play areas; service and storage area; and special areas for vegetable and flower gardens.



Ill. 1. Formal Balance

When planning your landscape, you will want to:

1. Preserve the best of existing features such as mature trees, rock outcroppings, etc.
2. Consider the views of the landscape from the house.
3. Be aware of exposures relative to light, wind, and temperatures.
4. Use deciduous and evergreen trees to create shade and to accent the house.
5. Think about specific family-related issues (young children may need more lawn area in which to play; needs may change as the family matures).
6. Consider maintenance requirements. For example, retirees may desire a simple landscape requiring less maintenance.

Design Principles

The following are primary design principles to keep in mind as you develop the plan.

1. *Scale*: the relation of the size of mature plants to the size of the house.
2. *Balance*: when the landscape is balanced, it is aesthetically pleasing. Balance may be symmetrical (formal) or asymmetrical (less formal).
3. *Unity*: the landscape relates to the house or accents the house. Using too many ideas (plants, colors, etc.) in a limited space leads to lack of unity.

4. *Rhythm*: the repetition of elements creates a rhythm; the landscape is harmonious and directs the eye of the observer.
5. *Simplicity*: less is more; create spaces, don't fill them up.
6. *Accent*: creates a focal point; the eye is directed to the house, an arbor, plant species, water garden, etc.
7. *Repetition*: the duplication of an element in the landscape. This might be a plant, a curve or angle, or even a color.
8. *Harmony*: is achieved through the pleasing arrangement of plants; involves the other elements or design principles.

The Landscape Plan

The actual plan requires preparation of a map in stages until you have a complete plan. The stages of development are:

1. *The Baseline Map* shows the house's dimensions, property lines, existing trees, problem areas, views, walkways, driveways, utility lines, etc.
2. *Use Areas* designates the recreation area(s), entertaining/dining area, other private area, vegetable garden, etc.
3. *Planting Plan* shows how plants will be used to create private areas, screen views, provide shade or wind breaks, separate different use areas, etc.
4. *Selecting Plant Material* involves knowing the characteristics of plants such as mature height and spread; their form (spreading, upright, arching, globe, etc.); their seasonal interest (foliage color, flowers, and fruit); their maintenance and cultural needs, etc.

Additional cultural maintenance factors for selected plant material include:

1. *Hardiness*: West Virginia lies in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's planting zones 5 and 6; these zones range from a low of -20° F in zone 5 to -10° F in zone 6.
2. *Soil*: Most plants have fairly specific requirements for optimum growth. These include proper pH, air movement, water drainage, organic matter, and nutrients.
3. *Sun and Shade*: Plant descriptions usually will note the degree of sun and/or shade required for optimum growth.
4. *Maintenance*: These factors include the need for water and specific nutrients; disease and insect pest control; pruning requirements; and nuisance issues such as fruit, root growth, etc.
5. *Aesthetics*: Does the plant being considered fit your plan? Are the texture, foliage color(s), flowers, fruit, bark, and general growth habit a good fit for the plan?

Planning and developing a beautiful home landscape can be a fulfilling, enjoyable task, the benefits of which you and your family will enjoy for many years.

References

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