

Home Horticulture from the Ground Up . . .

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Introduction

Landscaping your home may be a major challenge, but following a well thought out plan or design will help you create the landscape you want. Landscape design is the art of organizing and enriching outdoor space with plants and structures in agreeable and useful relationships with the natural environment. With that definition in mind, simply planting trees and shrubs and creating flower beds is not landscaping. Landscaping is planning or designing for the best use of available space. Designing a landscape is an art that involves not only plants but also fences, walls, patios, decks, walkways, etc.

Developing the Plan

In 2001, 22 million homeowners spent \$18.7 billion to hire professional landscape, tree, and lawn care services, and 85 million homeowners spent \$37.7 billion to purchase everything from petunias to fish from garden centers and nurseries. So, where do you start? Begin by becoming more knowledgeable about landscaping principles. You can purchase your own resources (books), visit the local library, or access the vast resources of information on the Internet. You may collect magazine photos of landscapes you like and begin noting the landscaping in your neighborhood and nearby housing developments. When traveling, you may want to take photos of landscaping elements that appeal to you.

An important decision to make at this point is whether to hire a professional landscaper to develop your landscape plan/design and do the on-site work or do it all yourself. There are advantages and disadvantages to both choices.



Ill. 1. Less Formal Balance

Working with the Professional

The advantages are:

- you will probably get the landscape you want;
- you could actually save money in the long run even though initial cost may seem high.

The disadvantages are:

- the initial high cost;
- the need for a detailed formal contract;
- the need for good communication with landscapers, etc.

Doing the Work Yourself

The advantages are:

- you can work at your own pace;
- you can easily make changes when necessary;
- costs may be less;
- you can create as you go.

The disadvantages are:

- it may take longer to complete the project;
- if major mistakes are made, the costs and lost time are yours to bear;
- you may lack knowledge about construction, plants, soil, etc.

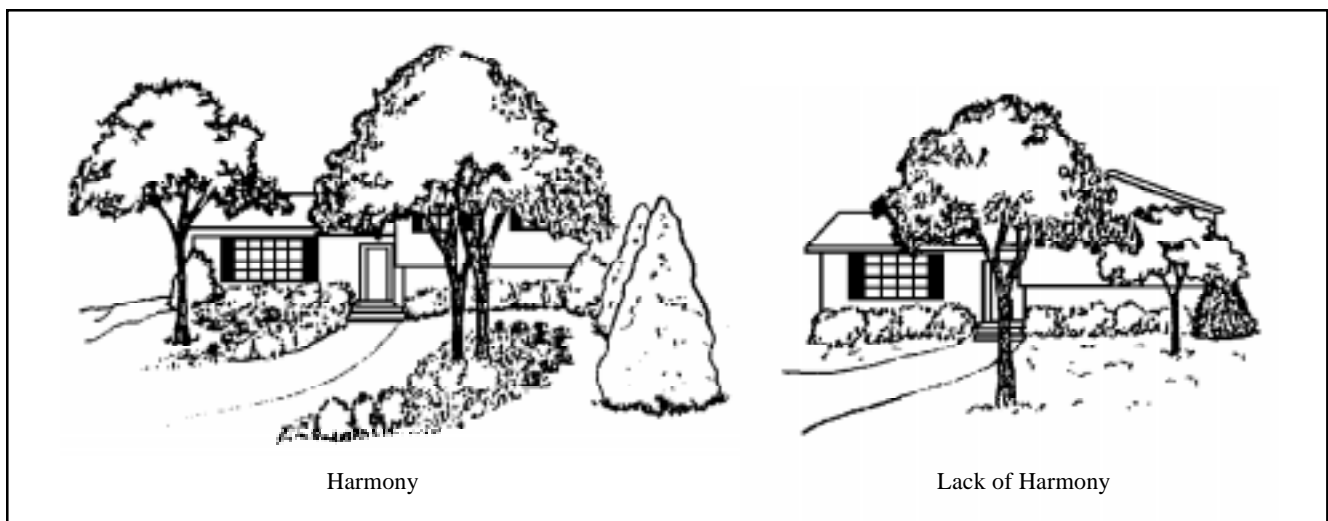
As with any project of this nature, you will have to deal with getting permits and solving utility issues.

A good alternative is to have a professional develop your landscape plan but you do the work. Another point to keep in mind is that a well-designed and maintained landscape may add up to 15 percent to your home's value.

Landscape Factors

1. Space utilization relates to the primary use of space in the landscape. The "public" area is usually the front view of the home and its landscape. The family's living or private area is usually at the side or rear of the home. It is the area composed of patios or decks and used for leisure activities, entertaining, and dining. Recreational areas in the landscape or play areas and their relative space needs will vary with the ages of family members and their interests. The service and/or storage space is usually occupied by trash bins, potting benches, etc. Finally, space may be needed for a vegetable or flower garden.
2. Preserving the best existing features on the property should be a priority. These include mature trees, rocks and boulders, water, and particularly topsoil. Consider adding man-made alterations, such as retaining walls, when necessary.

3. The views from inside the house are factors to be considered. What is seen from the various windows and doors can create a sense of open space or even one of being enclosed.
4. The exposure or aspect of the property is important to consider when selecting plant materials for placement in the plan. The north, south, east, and west exposures may also influence the location of structures such as fences, arbors, etc.
5. The placement of plants to achieve shaded areas in the landscape is another factor. Choosing deciduous or evergreen species relates to the aspect discussed in Factor 4. Large trees should be planted at the corners of the house to accent the house and to avoid blocking windows.
6. Family needs may change over time. Families and children will need more play or recreation space. Later, the sandbox may give way to a water garden. Large lawn areas may yield to plantings of more expensive trees or shrubs. Plantings requiring less maintenance may be very attractive to retirees.
7. Maintaining the home landscape is a major concern for many folks. The premise is that simple equals less maintenance. This may mean having less lawn area, more ground covers, fences or walls rather than hedges, and smaller flower beds. You may use native plant materials and mulches instead of chemical weed controls.



Ill. 3. Landscape Harmony

Design Principles

(Note: The numbered illustrations mentioned below can be found with this study topic on the WVU Extension Service Web site [www.wvu.edu/extension/infoces/pub/ceospub.htm].)

The elements of landscape design complement one another; each element is a part of the whole.

1. *Scale*: The mature size of trees and shrubs in relation to the size of the house. It is obviously desirable to know the mature size of selected plant material.
2. *Balance*: A balanced landscape is aesthetically pleasing. There are two types of balance; symmetrical and asymmetrical. Symmetrical is more formal and characterized by equal size plants or masses of plant materials. Asymmetrical is less formal and characterized by larger plants balanced by a mass of smaller plants. (Illustration 1)
3. *Unity*: The landscape should accent the house. Using too many plants, colors, or structures in a limited space should be avoided. We've all seen home landscapes so full of "stuff" it is difficult to truly see anything.
4. *Rhythm*: The repetition of elements in the landscape creates a visual rhythm. The landscape's rhythm directs the observer to a focal point or various focal points through the harmonious repetition of plant masses, curves, straight lines, etc.
5. *Simplicity*: The axiom "less is more" applies here. It is more desirable to create spaces in the landscape rather than filling the spaces with plants.
6. *Accent*: Relates to creating a focal point(s). The accent elements lead the eye to the house, an arbor, a plant specimen, a water garden, etc. (Illustration 2)
7. *Repetition*: This element is intended to create balance and harmony in the landscape, not the boring repetition (overuse) of the same elements, such as plants and walls. For example, the specific radius of a curve may be repeated as you move through the landscape.



Ill. 2. Accent

8. *Harmony*: This element is achieved simply by the pleasing arrangements of plant materials and the effective involvement of the other design elements or principles. (Illustration 3)

(Note: The design principles or elements presented here are not intended to be exclusive. You may find additional principles to present.)

Preparing the Plan

The plan or design will require developing a map showing the areas of primary use and the placement of plant materials and structures.

1. *The Baseline Map* is prepared to scale and includes the dimensions of the house, property lines, north point, problem areas (wetness, rock outcroppings, etc.), views and comments, existing elements (trees, etc.) walks, driveways, and locations of sewer lines, septic tanks, water lines, etc. (Call before you dig!) In addition, any significant changes in elevation should be noted on the baseline map. (Illustration 4)
2. *Use Areas* may include the children's play area, entertaining/dining area, flower beds, vegetable garden, other private areas, water gardens, etc. (Illustration 5)
3. *The Landscaping Plan* shows plant placings to separate use areas, screen undesirable areas, provide shade or wind breaks, create private areas, etc. As you locate plantings, consider the location of overhead power and telephone lines, sewers, septic tanks, etc. (Illustration 6)

4. *The Specific Plants Plan* depends on your knowledge. You must know the mature size of the plants you are considering, plus their growth habit (spreading, upright, arching, globe, etc.) and their best use (shade, background, hedge, screen, etc.). Do the plants have a seasonal interest such as flowers, foliage, and/or fruit? Are they deciduous, evergreen, broad-leaf evergreen? How much maintenance is required? What are the plants' cultural needs in terms of shade, sunlight, soil type, pH, etc.?
(Illustration 7)

Developing and following a good landscape plan should provide many years of enjoyment and ultimately not only add value to your home but also add immensely to your family's quality of life.

References

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