



ESSENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS IN PLANNING THE HOME LANDSCAPE

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Landscaping is the development of land features for the creation of outdoor living environments which provide aesthetic and sensory appeal, buffer negative environmental forces, filter the air we breathe, cleanse the water we drink, provide wildlife habitat, and enhance property values. The created landscape has become the outdoor living environment of urban America.

LANDSCAPES ARE GENERALLY DIVIDED INTO THREE AREAS ACCORDING TO THEIR USE

A. Public Area

- i) This is the area of the home, usually in the front, where people will approach and enter your home.
- ii) This area makes the first impression on visitors and guests and deserves the greatest effort, attention, money, priority.
- iii) This area should tastefully understate the home.
- iv) This area should be designed to remain attractive throughout the year regardless of the season.
- v) Avoid crowding the walkway with plants too large.
- vi) Avoid the use of straight walkways from the street to the front door. These tend to bisect the yard and make it look smaller.

B. Private Area

- i) This area includes back or side yards reserved for recreation, relaxation, and entertainment.

- ii) This area should provide privacy, seclusion, sanctuary.
- iii) Include surfaces for all desirable purposes including open turf for children to play and all weather surfacing for outdoor relaxation and entertaining.
- iv) Exercise greater creativity in the private area, e.g., perennial flower borders, transitional plantings to natural surroundings and wildlife habitat, bird feeding stations, etc.
- v) Reduce maintenance by creating smaller, more intimate areas and enclosures that contain more intensive plantings on a somewhat smaller scale.
- vi) The private area is sub-divided and organized according to its various uses, e.g., sports activities, entertainment, sitting, flower gardening, etc. These areas should be connected by walks and trails allow maximum integration. Establishing traffic patterns should be one of your primary design criterion. Consider how the various activity areas relate to each other, how they will be used, and by whom.

C. Work Area

- i) This area is designed for trash cans, compost pile, dog run, boat storage, firewood, clothes line, kitchen garden, cut flower garden, greenhouse, garden shed, etc.
- ii) This area is usually located on the side of the home near the garage and should have a walkway to the front yard or even a driveway to a side street or alley.
- iii) Screen this area from view of the private area and from neighbors.
- iv) Create a place for everything and keep everything in its place. This is a work yard not a junk yard. If you don't need it throw it out or sell it. That's another way to create more usable landscape space.

SITE ANALYSIS

- A) Check easements and building set backs.
- B) Locate property lines/surveyor pins.
- C) Does site meet your building requirements?
- D) Check surface drainage/erosion/surface run-off preferably during a heavy rain event.
- E) Check soil texture, depth, internal drainage and percolation.
- F) Identify species and condition of existing vegetation and evaluate for suitability in the

landscape.

G) Check vehicle headlight and traffic noise patterns, especially on corner lots and at road intersections.

H) Identify and locate utility lines.

I) Identify seasonal sun and wind patterns especially for summer and winter.

SITE PREPARATION

A) Correct soil and drainage problems identified in site analysis.

B) Save as much of the existing natural vegetation as possible by using only hand tools under the canopies of desirable plants and restricting machinery access to root zones with optic and barricade-type fencing.

C) Put a price tag on especially valuable plants such as large trees as a warning to contractors.

D) Stockpile topsoil prior to grading/excavation work and return to areas to be landscaped after construction.

E) Move additional topsoil onto site prior to planting to increase soil depth if necessary but match the existing soil texture as closely as possible using a medium-textured soil.

F) Turf grasses need 6-12 inches of well-drained, medium-textured soil, ground covers need 12-18 inches, shrubs need 18-24 inches of soil, and trees need 24-36 inches of soil. To check drainage, dig a hole one foot deep below the prescribed soil depth and fill it with water. If the hole drains completely within 24 to 48 hours the soil is drained well enough to plant virtually any plant.

HARDSCAPE ELEMENTS IN BRIEF

Hardscape elements include non-plant elements such as driveways, walkways, patios, terraces, steps, retaining walls, benches, decks, fences, trellises, raised planters, surface mulches, pottery, sculpture, birdbaths, bird feeders, nesting boxes, lighting, and water features including drainage structures, reflecting pools, fountains, and irrigation systems.

A) Hardscape elements are constructed of numerous materials including crushed stone, asphalt, concrete, bricks, stones, pavers, iron, steel, ceramics, wood, and recycled plastics.

B) Hardscape materials should always be selected for compatibility with existing materials used in the home.

C) Hardscape elements can overpower the landscape and should be used tastefully to support the overall design.

D) Hardscape elements often require professional assistance to install correctly.

E) Hardscape elements are expensive initially but if well constructed in a well designed landscape will return the investment for years to come with usually low maintenance and return the original investment value upon resale of the home. The operative words here are "well constructed" and "well designed". Get professional assistance if you are unsure.

SOFTSCAPE ELEMENTS IN BRIEF

Softscape elements include plants used for various purposes throughout the landscape to achieve certain objectives including, shade trees, enframent trees, evergreen screens, specimen plants, corner plantings, foundation plantings, accents, turfgrasses, groundcovers, climbing vines, flowering annuals, perennial flowers, wildflowers, and native and ornamental grasses.

A) Trees

i) Plant enframent trees 10 to 25 feet away from the front corners of the home to soften and obscure roof lines.

ii) Plant deciduous shade trees on the southern and western exposures of the home to reduce summer cooling bills.

iii) Plant large trees in the backyard which extend above the roof ridge so they appear as a back ground of greenery when viewed from the public area.

iv) Plant small flowering specimen trees for accent near the front entryway and at natural focal points such as the intersection of any two planes such as walls, fences, and surface treatments.

v) Plant shade trees with spreading canopies over patios, decks, terraces or wherever you want to sit, relax or entertain in the summer.

vi) Plant large evergreen trees where you want to hide unsightly views, screen harsh winter winds, or abate noise, glare, dust, etc.

B) Accents and Specimens

i) Trees, shrubs, flowers, porch lights, banners, etc., can be used as accents to bring attention to focal points in the landscape. Specimens are single plants used as accents.

ii) The front entry is the focal point of the public area and is a suitable place for a strong

accent.

iii) Draw an imaginary line through the door. Decide which half of the home has more visual weight and place a major accent by the door on the "lighter" side, and a minor accent by the door on the "heavier" side.

iv) Major accents might include a single upright shrub or a small tree in a bed of groundcover.

v) Minor accents might include a cluster of dwarf shrubs, potted plants, a climbing flowering annual vine or an attractive porch light.

vi) Single, upright plants cause the eye to "stop" and you only want this to happen at focal points so be careful how you use them.

vii) Use accents such as flowering trees or color beds in the private area wherever you have focal points. When creating multiple focal points viewed from a single vantage point use the same or similar plants for your accent and, if possible relate them geometrically to a stronger central focal point. Sculpture is one of the strongest accents you can use.

viii) Accent plantings should be composed of odd numbers of plants such as one, three, five, seven, etc., so the center point can be found and the eye can find rest.

ix) When using color for accent, pick one or two colors and stay with them, repeating them throughout the landscape, such as in raised planters, decorative pots, hanging baskets, color beds, etc., to establish a color scheme.

C) Corner Plantings

i) Sweep around the corners of the home or arc into the front yard to soften, tie down the corners and to make the home appear larger.

ii) The mature height of the corner plantings should be between one-third and two-thirds the distance from the ground line to the eave of the roof.

iii) Compose a plant grouping of two or three kinds so they flow down in height to that of the foundation plantings. This helps to draw the eye to the focal point at the front entry where the accents are placed.

D) Foundation and Transition Plantings

i) These plants act to help you transition from the corner plantings to the accents or from one focal point such as a specimen, or sculpture to another.

ii) For foundation plantings use low growing materials that will not cover windows such as groundcovers or dwarf shrubs.

iii) For foundation plantings choose two or three kinds of plants and stay with them all the way across the front of the home from the corner plantings to the accent plantings. This provides continuity and helps tie the landscape together.

iv) Use foundation plantings on the side of the home if on a corner lot or if the home will typically be viewed from the side.

vi) Foundation or transition plantings that tie accent, corner or specimen plantings together should have even numbers of plants, such as two, four, six, etc., if individual plants can be viewed and their number is fewer than a dozen.

E) Groundcovers

i) Groundcovers are used as a replacement for turf in the shade.

ii) Avoid planting groundcovers in the sun because they will require considerable weed control.

iii) If groundcovers are used in the sun a geo-textile weed block fabric must be used to prevent weed growth.

iv) Groundcovers make an excellent transition material between shrubs and turf areas, and between corner plantings and entryway accents.

F) Screens

i) Screens are used to create privacy, hide unsightly views, block winter winds, and abate noise, dust and glare.

ii) Screens can be created with walls, fences, evergreen trees and shrubs, or trellised evergreen vines.

iii) Fences and walls provide instant screening but cost more than plants to install and maintain.

iv) Screens can be of any length or line and need not create an enclosure in order to be effective.

v) Screens can be used to deflect or direct the eye to areas of interest.

G) Turfgrasses

- i) Turfgrasses are ideal for outdoor play areas.
- ii) Turfgrasses are one of the best plant materials for erosion control.
- iii) Turfgrasses are the least expensive plant types to establish on a per area basis.
- iv) Turfgrasses require more maintenance including, mowing, watering, fertilizing, weed control, and pest management than any other plant type except flowers.
- v) Limit the use of permanent turfgrasses to areas you need turf for outdoor recreation or to open areas up for increased light penetration.
- vi) Not all turfgrass species are alike. Some require greater care than others and care should be taken to choose the one(s) you can properly manage.

H) Wildflowers and Native and Ornamental Grasses

- i) Wildflowers and native and ornamental grasses can be used in massed plantings to create a striking effect in the landscape.
- ii) Areas massed in these natural plantings can be used to attract and harbor butterflies and other pollinators as well as birds, reptiles and other wildlife.
- iii) These more naturalized plantings can be tastefully located and blended within the formal landscape in many cases and can nearly always be used successfully at the edges of the property as transition plantings that tie into the native landscape.

SUMMARY NOTES

- A) Include the entire family in the design of the home landscape and consider everyone's interests and needs as the plan is developed.
- B) Plant trees and turf first. Turf is the best way to control erosion and stabilize the site and down the road you will always wish you had planted more trees early on.
- C) Select your tree species carefully. They can be your best friend or your worst enemy in the landscape. Either way they will be with you for a long time.
- D) Use landscaping to create food, cover, water, and nesting resources for wildlife. This is a primary function of the natural landscape your home has displaced and although often overlooked this aspect can be one of the most rewarding.
- E) Develop an overall landscape plan on paper and implement it over a period of time, maybe years. You will probably be adding things through the years anyway rather than planting it all at once so you may as well have an overall plan in place to elaborate your design and provide

continuity. It is easier to change your design on paper than in the yard after it's planted. By the way, it's okay to change your plan, just do it on paper first and make sure it is an improvement. You can only have it one way so be sure it's what you want.