

# *down to earth*

## *Landscaping Techniques & Tips*



photo courtesy of Axelrod Designs, see page 145 for more information

## *Planning Your Outdoors for Beauty and Comfort*

One of the special pleasures that comes with building your new home is the planning, creation and enjoyment of your outdoor living space.

With proper landscaping of trees, shrubs and flowers, you can add beauty, comfort and value to your new home. Landscaping can even help cut down energy bills by providing shade, reducing air temperature through evaporation and absorbing heat. The benefits of a well-designed landscape are abundant.

Before you started building your house you gathered as much information about the surrounding area as possible. In much the same way, the first step in beautifying your outdoors is assessing your plot. Observing every view of the house, noticing where the sun hits and noises you hear will all play a role in designing your landscape.

When analyzing the plot think of your family's needs. Where do you want access to your house, parking,

sun, shade, work and recreation areas, and gardens? Also, think of play space for children, an outdoor living area, privacy, windbreaks, etc. The most satisfying landscapes are both practical and beautiful.

You may want to seek professional help if you have the desire and means to do so. Local nurseries, university extension services, landscape architects and garden designers can provide valuable new insight to constructing your landscape.

Now it's time to bring out the sketchpad and draw a model of your site. Focus on the main areas such as the entryway, foundation and outdoor living areas. Once you have analyzed your site, you are ready to concentrate on beautifying the space you have. Create a base plan by sketching possible ideas for your design.

The main goal of a well-designed landscape is to create a beautiful arena that will last a long time with year-round interest. The way to achieve this is to use a wide range of plants: from trees and shrubs to climbers,

perennials, annuals and bulbs. Design a planting scheme to mix plants in a complementing manner to create style, mood and add color and texture. Create a visual relationship between the house and the site by using plants found growing naturally on the site, repeating architectural lines of the house and using building material that blends well in the natural environment. Your design should focus on the flow, scale and rhythm among all living and non-living items.

A good balance of construction and plant materials is a characteristic of a well-designed landscape. Don't forget about those non-living items such as brick, fencing, benches, garden furniture, birdbaths, lighting, etc. These construction and accessory items can help express individual tastes and preferences.

Planning a beautiful landscape can be a daunting task. There are countless options in choosing a design and materials. Have fun with the hours of thoughtful planning and a joyful setting is sure to arise.

# Digging up the dirt on landscaping

You have a plan; you're ready to dig in! It is time to get your hands dirty and start creating your beautiful landscape. Planting a design of symmetry and balance, providing beautiful colors, texture and fragrance is sure to be a rewarding experience.

## Lasting Beauty

The background in a beautiful design most people often overlook is the lawn. Two ways to achieve a new lawn are by seed or sod. The advantages of seed are lower costs and wider variety; disadvantages are labor, time it takes the grass to fill in and weeds. Sod's main advantage is obvious – instant lawn. The main drawback is cost.

From evergreen to deciduous and accent to shade, trees are the most prominent and permanent plants on any property. Their many benefits include absorbing heat, reducing noise, framing homes and offering beautiful foliage and blooms. Since there are no "best" trees, personal preferences play a major role in choosing trees.

Shrubs are the perfect complement to your trees. They are ideal in creating a perennial base to define and outline garden spaces. Shrubs provide year-round beauty in all their stages of life. Many also provide a romantic fragrance to enliven your senses. Lilacs, hydrangeas and gardenias are just a few of the popular shrub species.

Before planting trees and shrubs it is vital to contact your local utility company to locate any buried gas and power lines. Once planted, mulch to keep weeds away and water regularly. According to landscape designer John Lanaghan, it is



essential to give new plantings about an inch of water per week for at least a year. This allows a good root system to take hold.

## Annuals, Perennials & Bulbs

Without a doubt, the most color and texture in a landscape come from annuals, perennials and bulbs.

Annuals complete their life cycle in a year. They offer flexibility in design and give you the opportunity to experiment with different varieties each year. Annuals also bring big

impact to high-traffic areas and willingly fill gaps in beds.

Perennials offer timeless beauty to any landscape, returning to life year after year. It is essential to choose perennials that will work well in your climate, then factor in personal taste. Create an ongoing show with flowers that bloom at different times of the summer or choose plants that peak at the same time for a dynamite display.

Bulbs are a basic part of every home landscape. There are two groups of bulbs. Spring-flowering bulbs, including tulips and daffodils, are planted in the fall and come to full bloom in the spring. Summer-flowering bulbs, including dahlias and begonias, are planted in the spring to produce blooms in the summer.

## Pulling It All Together

A balanced landscape design is one that offers beauty and comfort year-round. By carefully selecting plants to express your personality and ones that fit your growing conditions, you will be rewarded with a landscape to enjoy for years to come.

The front yard is a good place to begin to create an inviting appearance to your home. Small trees work well to flank the front door while shrubs work to define entryways. Annuals and perennials work well for quick blasts of color.

Mix plantings up throughout garden beds to create a good view from every direction. Large plants work to frame windows and anchor the home. Also think of the off-season, including plenty of evergreens to continue your landscape's beauty throughout the year.

## Tender Loving Care

Phew! It's all done and looks wonderful. You have the landscape of your dreams. But don't sit back and relax now. Hard work and commitment are essential – your landscape

Spring is nature's way of saying, 'Let's Party!'

~ Robin Williams, actor

won't stay beautiful by itself. Lanaghan's most important gardening tip is to keep a regular maintenance schedule that will keep the landscape healthy rather than correcting problems as they arise.

A well-maintained lawn will set the tone for the rest of the landscape. Mow high and keep borders well-manicured.

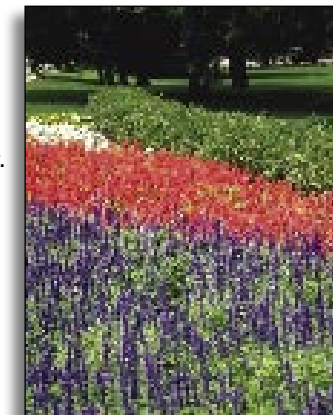
An obvious need for plants is water. Rainwater is best, but most areas do not get enough. It is best to water plants in the morning to allow drying time before evening when fungus starts to brew. Many varieties of irrigation options include sprinklers, timers and underground systems.

Be prepared for a battle to win the war on weeds. Proper fertilization, watering and aeration can help you get a good start. In addition to regular maintenance, weed fabrics are gaining popularity. "A good weed fabric is well worth the money," said Lanaghan. "Most are guaranteed to prevent weeds for 10, even 20 years."

Mulch carries many benefits including retaining moisture, holding back weeds, and creating a tidy appearance. However, don't smother gardens too much which can deprive them of oxygen and water.

Proper pruning of trees and shrubs is one more task to keep your landscape healthy and beautiful. Pruning can begin when plants are still young to ensure a well-grown plant.

Selecting plants and watching them come to life and grow is sure to be a joy for you, your family and something that guests can take part in for many years. A huge investment of time and money is required but it is well worth it. Your labors will bring you countless rewards.



## Spring Training

Wake up gardeners – It's Spring! It is time to tackle the outdoors and bring beautiful blossoms to life.

This is cleanup time. Major tasks are to clear out all the leaves and debris the fall and winter dropped on your beautiful gardens. Trim all dead branches off trees and shrubs to make room for new growth.

This also is the time to sow seeds and make weeding a priority. It's important to get ahead of those pesky weeds before they start growing.

There are many key jobs for the springtime.

In early spring sow hardy annuals, uncover and prune roses, and tidy bed borders by weeding and mulching.

By mid spring the lawn will need mowing regularly and kept in shape with weeding and feeding. This also is the time to plant new roses, trees, shrubs and perennials. Plant to fill in empty spots left by unsuccessful plants last season. Look to prepare new flower beds or extend existing ones. It's also important to feed your existing trees, roses, shrubs and established beds with a general-purpose organic feeder.

After the last frost of spring it is safe to plant half-hardy annuals and transplant the houseplants. Summer-flowering bulbs also should be on your list to plant.

The highlights of spring are blooming bulbs, tree blossoms and flowering shrubs. These will provide a wonderful color display throughout the season.

Spring-flowering bulbs planted in the fall will come to life after the long winter. Tulips, daffodils and hyacinth are three of the most popular spring bulbs.

Spring-blossoming trees are the perfect

complement to bulbs. Three most popular are the crab apple, flowering dogwood and flowering cherry.

Shrubs are sure to delight your outdoor environment, especially those landscapes with acid soil. It's important to prune your shrubs after they've flowered to keep them neat and tidy. Two beautiful shrubs are the rhododendron and camellia.

Spring is a beautiful season that brings color, fragrance and texture to enliven your senses. Take pleasure in all your hard work and watch your beautiful gardens come to life.

