

How to be Your OWN Landscape Designer

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What we will discuss

- What do you want? Need?
- What are your goals? Style?
- How to do it, and what to think about during the design process
- A few tips



There are so many possibilities in designing a landscape! Where do you start?



The most important thing is to have a plan, even if you will start small. By the way, a lot of what I will say here is just basic common sense, things that you already know.



How about a garden bed?

It helps to have the garden bed you're designing as part of a larger plan

Or a beautiful container garden



The principles of design are mostly the same

What do you need?

- Privacy
- Entertainment areas
- Functional areas
- Driveways
- Pathways and access to house
- Trash can spot made attractive
- Maintenance and storage areas
- Provide for wildlife
- Curb appeal
- Flood work arounds
- Irrigation if you'll be away
- Play areas
- Good access to/from the house

To start, think about what you might need - here are some, you may have more

What are your goals?

- Think creatively!
- Play area? Dining area? Swimming pool?
- Pollinator garden? Cutting garden? Vegetable garden?

What do you want? If you're designing a whole yard, or even part, this is the time to really get creative, and think of any possible uses you might want to include - now, or in the future.

What is your style?

- Think of your home interior
- There are many places to get inspiration



Cottage garden? Formal garden? Casual beach area? What speaks to you?

Go to local public gardens, garden centers, or your neighbors for inspiration. This is Piet Oudolf's perennial meadow at the Delaware Botanic garden, in Dagsboro.

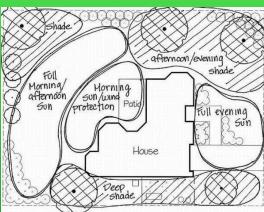
So, how do you design a landscape anyway?

- Do a site inventory and analysis
- Determine your needs and wants
- Create a functional diagram
- Refine that into a concept drawing
- These will make the final plan

These are roughly the steps you should go through - plant choice, technically, is the last thing

Think about the location

- Sun or shade
- Water availability
- Soil
- By studying your location, you'll make sure each plant has the best living conditions. It's much better to put the right plant in a spot, than trying to change your environmental parameters

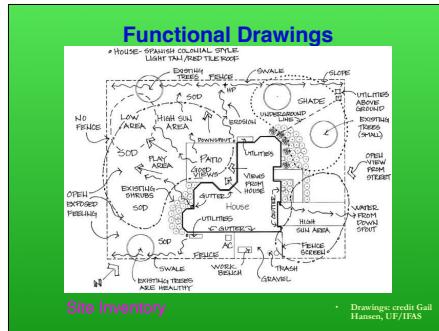


To start, study the site. Study the sun and wind patterns, and around here, the water. You might want to place a patio on the west side of the house, but it will get lots of afternoon sun, which means dinnertime in August could be unpleasantly hot. And wind whistling around a corner will quickly extinguish a fire pit. Flooding? Very common here. Your design should take into account what the sun, water, and wind do at different times of the day and year.

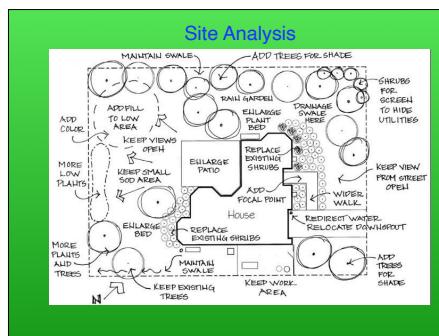
Site Inventory and Analysis

- The inventory looks at everything on the site, including what would have been there.
- The analysis looks at all the conditions on the site - where are shady areas, or sunny? Identify low, wet spots. Where is the prevailing wind coming from? What views are nice? Or not? Check your soil with a soil test.

The two, inventory and analysis are different. You'll combine them soon. Don't forget property lines, utilities, existing vegetation and what shape it's in, erosion, existing hardscaping and whether it works for you in the inventory. Think about what works, and what doesn't. Think about what would have been growing on your site if humans had not intervened - those are the plants that will grow the best.



It is essential to note all the existing conditions on an accurate base map when doing the site inventory (Figure 2). Utilities such as power lines, septic tanks, underground utilities and roof overhangs determine plant location. Use a surveyor's plat of your property for the boundaries and location of your home. Measure and note on the survey other structures and hardscape such as patios, driveways, or sidewalks. It is very important to hire a surveyor if you do not have a plat; guessing the location of boundaries can be a costly mistake. 1/4 inch graph paper is useful here.



What do you think about your site? Remember that a lot of the conditions are not practical to change, in the long run.

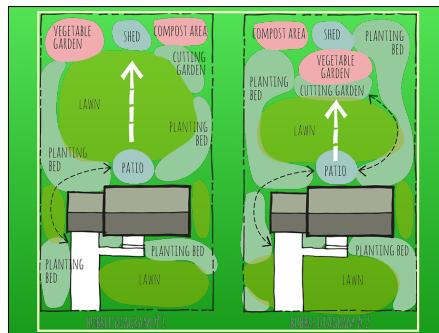


This is where you analyze current uses. Do they work for you? It is very important to consider how you currently use the yard. For example—which entry is used by whom, where do the kids play and where does the dog usually run? Thinking about how you currently use the yard, and how you want to use the yard in the future, determines the need to re-organize old spaces into new spaces and amenities. It is also important to remember vehicles used; driveways and parking are space intensive. Budget concerns include the materials, initial installation costs and the on-going maintenance costs. Determine the time and money you are willing to put into maintaining the plants and hardscape—be realistic about your intentions and ability. Are you away a lot - will you need irrigation?

Concept Drawings

- Also known as a bubble diagram
- This is where you let your imagination go
- Use what you learned about your site to dictate where your bubbles should be placed

This is where putting it all on paper really helps. Use tracing paper, or make several copies of your site analysis.



More examples of concept drawings

Final Plan

- Finally, we add plants!
- The needs of the site, your wishes, and what you clarified in the previous plans will dictate plant selection

Choosing plants is actually the last thing you do

Some principles of Landscape Design

- Color - use the colors you like! Keep it simple, or not
- Texture - fine or coarse. Sharp contrasts can be very eye catching
- Line - a few strong lines, curved or straight.
- Form - plants and flowers can be tall or short, vase shaped or round, daisies or plumes
- Mass - 1 plant has a form but several together have mass

These are some of the guidelines that every designer has in the back of their mind as they sketch out a design.

You can go overboard with color, but if you like it, that's all that matters
Texture is particularly important in a shade garden or anywhere you don't have a lot of flowers

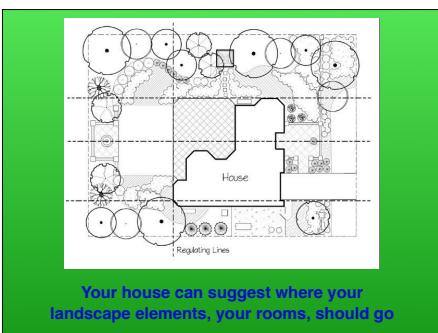
Form can be natural or pruned

Think of empty spaces as well as filled, for mass

Make sure your lines are simple. Think about mowing around your areas.



Now you start picking plants, at least 2/3 of them native, to plug into your plan. The conditions you defined and the needs and wants you articulated will dictate what should go where. Start with your structural plants - the trees, or those that define walls or lines. Start with the big ones, and go smaller. This Serviceberry looks great year round, important for your main plants.



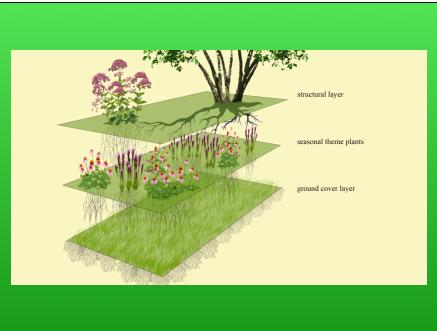
The lines of your house will anchor your garden to the overall whole. Think of rooms in your garden, a continuation of your house.

Plant in Layers

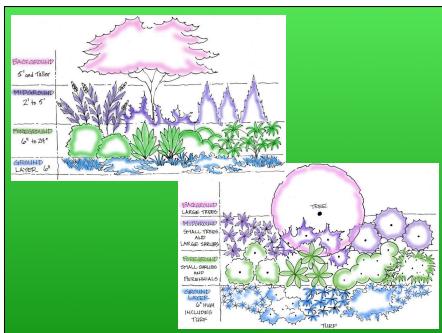
- In nature, plants grow in clusters and drifts, extending to overlap and interlock in layers as they merge with each other.
- It is helpful to study the composition of natural massings of plants and use similar patterns to arrange plants in a planned landscape.
- Pattern is produced both with layers and repetition. Plant layers occur vertically with variation in height and horizontally with plant masses along the ground plane.

The best way to arrange plants in a garden - large trees, then understory trees, then shrubs, then perennials. Or just taller perennials with shorter ones around it. These are the ways plants grow naturally, and replicating patterns found in nature is the best way to help your plants succeed.

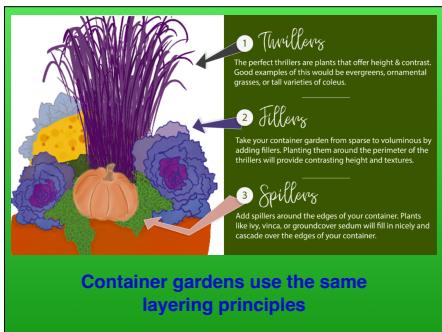




Here's how landscape designer Claudia West does it.



Horizontal and plan views of layers.



Thrillers, fillers, and spillers, classic container design concept.



Keep it personal, what you like and what appeals to you
 Put it off center if you want
 Make sure it looks nice 12 months a year
 Use it to direct the view



Think about Scale, and Pacing

- Scale is the size of landscape elements in relation to their surroundings - your house, maybe, or other parts of the yard.
- Pacing, or Movement, is what keeps your eye moving through the design, and moving smoothly, not jumping around



Scale and pacing give your yard, garden bed or container a pulled-together look. There will be variations in size, shape, and color, with tall plants against a building or in the back of a flowerbed, and paths that lead people through the space. Find a good balance between repetition and new elements. Repetition gives a sense of cohesion, but you also don't want it to be monotonous. An occasional new element is better than having all different elements throughout.

Out of scale, and in scale.

Tips and tricks

- Think of boundaries, visual or actual.
- Make rooms in your garden, with passageways in-between
- Make sure any pathways can accommodate 2 people easily, 4 feet wide is good
- Lines can be straight or curvy but just a few strong lines are better. One strong curve, rather than a wavy line. Think about mowing along that line, too
- Angles should be right angles, or close. Otherwise you end up with difficult to plant areas
- Think about the ultimate size of the plant - there are smaller varieties of almost all plants.
- Make sure there will be at least a foot between the plant and your house when the plant is full grown - leave space for air circulation, or to get in and work

More things to think about

- If your patio or deck will be used for dining, make sure it's big enough to accommodate not only seating and dining, but mingling as well
- Avoid hardscape materials that may become slippery when wet
- Use plants to create additional comfort to your landscaped rooms. Shade and wind breaks are important considerations as are living privacy screens
- In nature, plants grow in clusters and drifts, extending to overlap and mix in layers as they merge with each other. It is helpful to think about the composition of natural massings of plants and use similar patterns to arrange plants in your landscape. Planting in layers helps with this.



Handy tools



Graph paper, tracing paper, and a scaleable ruler



Versailles, France

Classic garden style. Great example of how people tried to control and dominate nature.



Keukenhof, Lisse, Netherlands

Look at the lines leading your eye.



Ryan - Ji, Kyoto, Japan

Expands your idea of what a garden is, anyway



Powerscourt Estate, Enniskerry, Ireland

Borrowed view, framed



Sissinghurst, Kent, England

Vita Sackville West's white garden



Anne Hathaway's garden

Shakespeare's wife, this is a classic cottage garden



Have fun in your garden!

Cute flower bed!

Helpful Websites:

- Gaviller, S. (2018). *Not Another Gardening Blog*. Word Press. Retrieved January 15, 2022, from <https://notanothergardeningblog.com/>
- Hansen de Chapman, G. (2021). *Ask IFAS: Lawn and Garden Design and Layout*. University of Florida. Retrieved 16 January 2022 From: <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/cn1016>