



HOW TO DESIGN YOUR OWN LANDSCAPE

A. BEGINNING THOUGHTS

- a. **IMAGINE** – it all begins with you thinking about what you want.
- b. **EXPLORE** – drive around your neighborhood to see what plants are doing well. Is there a certain style you'd like to emulate? Xeric, English Cottage, Border Garden? Visit your local nurseries to view their plant offerings and their display gardens. Take pictures of plants or designs that you like.
- c. **RESEARCH** – find out the names of the plants you like. Again, nurseries often offer free material, or have great books for specific information. Take advantage of the Grow Green Guide by The City of Austin.

B. LOCATION & GROWING CHALLENGES

Once you've decided on the area you'd like your beds or plantings, there are a few crucial things you'll need to take into account.

- a. **SUN** – Notice how much sun the area receives - *exactly*. You may have to set an alarm and go out every hour and take a picture or write down where the sun is. It is crucial to know the amount of sun an area receives for the best results.
- b. **SHADE** – Likewise, if your area is shady, you'll have to determine how much. Morning shade vs. afternoon shade. What is causing the shade? Trees? Your house? Your neighbor's house? An awning? The degree of shade makes a big difference for plants.
- c. **WIND DIRECTION** – Which direction will the bed face? Is there a prevailing wind?
- d. **SOIL** – Know what you have. Can you dig a hole? If not, raised beds it is. What color is your soil? The color helps you to know what it consists of and therefore what you need to add. **AMEND YOUR SOIL WELL BEFORE PLANTING.**
- e. **DRAINAGE AND SLOPE** – Will your bed be at the bottom of a slope or at the top? How quickly would a hole filled with water drain (crucial for Roses and others). Notice where the water runs during a good hard rain.
- f. **EXISTING PLANTS** – Are there trees or shrubs shading the area? Are there existing plants you'd like to incorporate into your design?
- g. **EXISTING STRUCTURES** – Notice the house, sheds, awnings, etc. These all will throw shade at some point in the day.
- h. **WATER SOURCE** – Where are your hoses going to be? Are you planning on an irrigation system?
- i. **THE DEER CHALLENGE** – Research your options for deer resistance.

C. DESIGN - HARDSCAPE

- a. **DRAW IT OUT** – You can use an existing plat map or draw one. Enlarge your map and make plenty of copies. Be sure to include on your map all of the existing structures and permanent plantings, trees, etc.
- b. **HARDSCAPING** – Metal, Rock, Wood? Do you want pathways, walls, large stones? Do you want decorative fencing, wattling? Do you want birdbaths, sculpture? Do you want a trellis for vines?

- c. **POTS** – Pots are an easy way to add a strong design element
- d. **EDGING** – Do you want metal, rock, wood?
- e. **BORDER** – Create an open space between your lawn and your beds for ease of maintenance. Consider using mulch, granite, rocks, landscaping cloth or plastic covered with mulch.
- f. **DRY CREEK** – Consider this option as a way to direct water run-off. Or, just as a decorative element.
- g. **SITTING AREA** – Always consider where you would like to sit and enjoy your garden. Furniture, benches, tables, and chairs all make a garden more inviting

D. DESIGN – PLANTS

- a. **SIZE (Height x Width)** – Create layers. Tall plants in back, medium in middle, short in front. How wide is the plant at maturity? This question is crucial. The **#1 MISTAKE** gardeners make (even old-timers) is planting too close together.
- b. **PLANT IN ODD NUMBERS** – Most designs are more harmonious when plants are grouped in odd numbers. The exception is formal gardens where symmetry is often desired.
- c. **EVERGREEN vs. HERBACEOUS** – Consider having a balance of evergreens, perennials, and annuals.
- d. **SPECIMEN PLANTS** – Use singular plants to make a strong design statement.
- e. **GRASSES** – Grasses add movement and grace to a garden and make a good specimen plant.
- f. **BULBS** – Make sure they grow and naturalize in Central Texas.
- g. **HERBS & EDIBLES** – Many herbs and edible plants look wonderful in a landscape design. Consider Rosemary as an evergreen.
- h. **VINES** – Consider mature size, invasiveness.
- i. **ROSES** – Roses are a wonderful edition to a landscape and are very drought resistant.
- j. **NATIVES & WELL-ADAPTED** –The Natural Gardener specializes in these types of plants.
- k. **WATER REQUIREMENTS** – Group plants together with similar water requirements. Consider drought tolerant options.
- l. **SUN AND/OR SHADE REQUIREMENTS** – Know what each plant selection prefers to grow in.

NOTES:

1. Remember to take things slowly; you should begin with one section of your landscape at a time.
2. Don't be embarrassed to call in a professional for some guidance; many of them will do an hour consultation which can be extremely beneficial.
3. When it's time to begin bed preparation, be sure to pick up our handout, *7-Step Guide to Organic Gardening*.
4. Check out The Natural Gardener's great book selection on this subject.
5. Take advantage of our Information Desk and free educational classes. *Sign up for our newsletter for great info!*

GLOSSARY OF TERMS:

- **PERENNIAL** – Usually refers to a flowering plant that comes back year after year. (Yellow Bells, Cigar Plant, Lantana)
- **ANNUAL** – Usually refers to a flowering plant that will last only one year or one season. (Periwinkle, Impatiens, Zinnias). Some **Re-seeding Annuals** drop seed and come back the next year. (Larkspur, Poppies, Bluebonnets)
- **EVERGREEN** – Often refers to shrubs and trees, but some perennials can also be evergreen. (Trees: Arizona Cypress, Magnolia, Cedars. Shrubs: Texas Sage, Yaupon Holly, Viburnum. Perennials: Iris, Salvia greggii, 4-Nerve and Blackfoot Daisies.)
- **HERBACEOUS** – A plant that dies to the ground in the winter, but will come back in spring. (Most Salvias, Tall Phlox, Cigar Plant, Lantana)
- **WATTLING** – Often used in cottage gardens, wattling is a type of fencing, often made with small branches or posts, or thick vines (traditionally woven grape vine or willow wood), to enclose a certain type of plant or area of the garden.