

Help! I don't know what to do with my yard! - By Wendy E. Santiago

Subtitle: Landscape design with the end in mind

1. Determine What You Want

- a. Think hard about what you really want. Your stuff serves you. You don't serve your stuff. Therefore, your garden serves you. You don't serve your garden.

What do you want your garden to do for you? Make your list. It may include; provide a beautiful environment to entertain my guests, refresh me after work, provide exercise, provide socialization with neighbors, provide food, increase my property value...

- b. What's realistic at this time in your life? Consider your budget, your time to tend the garden, and your interest in gardening. Some people want a beautiful landscape, but have no time or interest in gardening. Keep a file for a future dream garden not suitable at this time.

2. Site Plan & Site Analysis

- a. Create a site plan on paper or computer. You can start with county maps for basic lot dimensions, then take site measurements and add structures and plants to remain on the plan. Google Maps and architectural drawings are useful tools. A site plan to scale is best, but you can move forward with a sketch too. For a small garden, $\frac{1}{4}'' = 1'-0''$ is a good scale. $\frac{1}{8}'' = 1'-0''$ or $\frac{1}{16}'' = 1'-0''$ are commonly used for larger properties.
- b. Record observations on site plan.
 - i. Add a north arrow and note sun/shade patterns at different times of the year
 - ii. Note wind direction and seasonal patterns
 - iii. Note views to screen out, views to preserve, and views to emphasize or borrow in the distance
 - iv. Note specifics for your property, such as an area with contaminated soil, an area with poor drainage, or a steep slope.
- c. Study context. What is the architectural style of your home? What is the character of your neighborhood? Is there any historical significance you may want to incorporate?

3. Conceptual Design

- a. Make a list of components you'd like your garden to accommodate. Go back to the list of what you want your garden to do for you. As you make this list of components, keep in mind what your site can realistically accommodate per the site analysis and your resources such as time, energy, and money. For example, you may list an herb garden, outdoor cooking/dining area, and a bird garden.
- b. Create at least three conceptual designs. Using trace paper over your site plan or a computer site plan, roughly sketch the components where you think they might work well on your property. If sketching, even rough sketching, intimidates you, use bubbles that are about the right size of each component. This is a study for you. It does not have to be pretty. Now, do it again and move the items around. I suggest you create at least three conceptual design options. Think about your design options and discuss your designs with others.

4. Master Plan or Design Development

- a. Decide on your garden theme. You want a cohesive garden and a theme helps. We have endless building materials and plants to choose from. A theme helps to make decisions and prevent garden chaos. Go back to what you want your garden to do for you and develop a theme. It can be as simple as 'a low maintenance PNW garden,' or 'a formal white garden to showcase landscape sculpture,' or 'a Japanese garden,' or 'a bird and butterfly native garden,' or 'a potager garden.' Garden themes are endless. Carry the theme throughout the property by using similar building materials and plants. (It's not as boring as you think.)
- b. Create a master plan (or a more detailed plan of areas to be modified).
 - i. After you've decided on your preferred conceptual design and a theme, draft the components where you want them on the site plan with more detail. If that's not going to happen, cut out images of what you want, attach them to your master plan, and use an arrow to indicate the location on the plan. The master plan is a communication tool, not a work of art. Have fun and make changes, if you like.
 - ii. Connect the components of your design. You want purposeful transitions from one garden area to another. Create a thoughtful pedestrian flow through your property. For example, position steps to the top of a hill, where a beautiful vista emerges, not where a wall blocks the view.
- c. Start your building materials and plant palettes. This is important for cohesion. Continuity through a property makes the property feel bigger and more comfortable (for most people).
 - i. Building Materials Palette - This list may have specific stone, complimentary decorative gravel, wood painted a color to match the house, and black metal accents. For example, you may use the stone for a patio, gravel walk edging, and a low retaining wall near the entry. You may use the wood painted or stained to match the house to build a pergola over the patio, a small gate to the vegetable garden, and an arbor that transitions to a rose garden. You may choose simple black metal landscape fixtures, similar to the color and texture of the house fixtures. Many different building materials on the same property feel discordant.
 - ii. Plant Material Palette - Decide which seasons are most important to you, and then start listing your trees. After the trees, select shrubs and perennials. You can also have lists for grasses, ferns, groundcovers, succulents, herbs, vegetables, fruits...

5. Construction Drawings and Construction

- a. Determine your budget and the area of construction - Add any detail needed to that area of the master plan. Get bids from contractors or decide to build it yourself.
- b. Value engineer design to reduce the cost, if necessary -You may want a large stone patio, but the bids are too high. Change the patio to integral colored concrete with a stone band to lower the price. If it's still too high, change the patio to compacted base rock with decorative gravel.

6. Enjoy Your Personal Landscape

- a. Please remember, your landscape serves you. Design it with that end in mind.
All the best, Wendy