

DESIGNING LANDSCAPE LAYERS



FOR CONTINUOUS
YEAR-ROUND COLOR
IN YOUR GARDEN

Designing Landscape Layers

For Continuous Year-Round Color & Interest In Your Garden

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Designing Your Dream Landscape



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Close your eyes and imagine your dream home's landscaping.

What do you see? The front door flanked with flowing pots of spring flowers? A backyard water fountain with succulents poking through rugged flagstone? A charming white picket fence with climbing rose vines and fluttering butterflies? Think about the colors, shapes, textures and style of your dream landscape.

What do you think is stopping you from making it a reality?

If it's simply knowledge and know-how, you are in the right place. If it's something more, it's best to pinpoint that reason right now. Is it unrealistic? Too much upkeep? Are you planning to move or buy a new home?

I ask this because the first thing gardening will teach you is **the art of patience**. While you can have fun planting beautiful trees, shrubs, plants, groundcovers, vines and bulbs, it may be awhile before you can actually see the fruits of your labor.

This is also why planning your landscape is so important. Not an inflexible plan that you can never change or adapt... I'm talking about more of a general plan and direction to move toward over time.

I like to think of a landscape like a house with different rooms. Just like a house, the rooms of your garden all serve different purposes. Breaking it down in this way makes landscaping your property less intimidating and much easier to achieve. Isn't that great news? You don't have to do it all at once! And each garden room can have its own purpose and focal point!

What We'll Cover

There's a lot of bits and pieces that go into creating a four season landscape. So, there's a lot that will be discussed. Just take this step by step, page by page so you don't get overwhelmed. This guide is structured in a way that will help you to create a layered landscape from start to finish.

In the first section, you'll learn some foundational pieces of gardening, like understanding gardening zones, climate, choosing the right tools, an overview of prepping your garden and basic planting techniques.

Next, we'll discuss the garden pyramid and how to use it to select trees, evergreen and deciduous shrubs, plants, flowers, grasses, vines, groundcovers and more. I will provide a few plant suggestions/recommendations in each of these categories. Just know that there are many, many more options than what I'm suggesting. And, sometimes the plants that work well in my climate may not work for you. More on this later, though!

Creating a mixed border is more than just choosing a wide variety of plants. So, the next section covers design principles like structure, repetition, size, shape, scale, balance and color. These principles will guide you to selecting the right plants and placing them properly in your landscape. And, I know this can be overwhelming, so afterwards I'll share all of my landscape layering tips and tricks for tying everything together.

Once you're armed with all of this knowledge, you'll get a list of my best resources for finding the perfect plants for your landscaping. I'll give you everything you need to conduct your own plant



Gary Barnes (CC0 1.0) via Pexels.

research so you can feel confident in selecting plants that will create a landscape that's uniquely you. To wrap things up, I'll share with you my process for combining different plants together so they look good, along with some of my favorite plant combinations that you can try in your own garden.

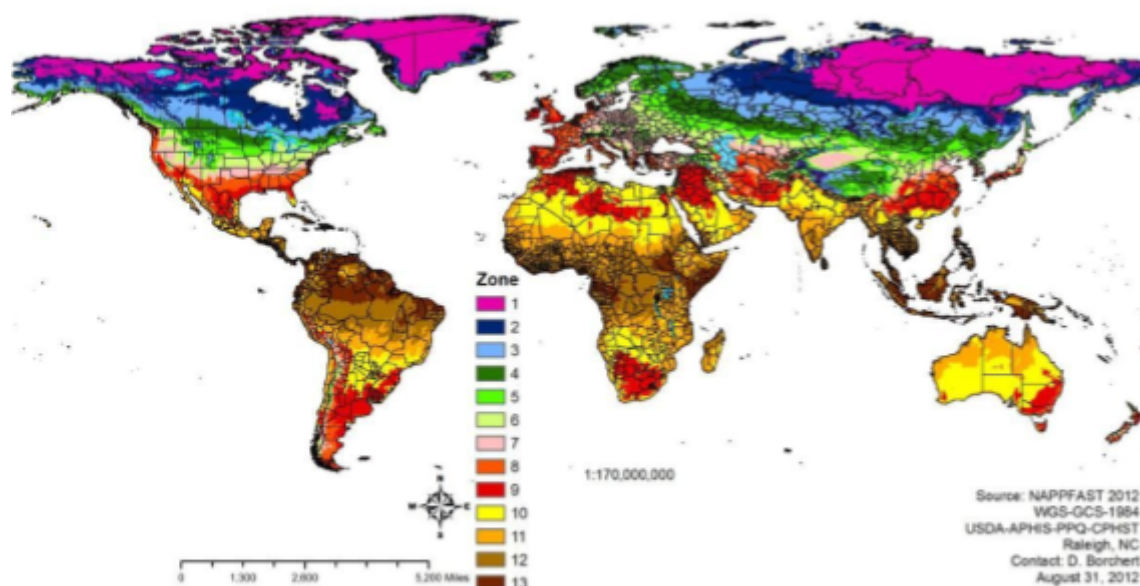
Throughout this guide, you'll also find helpful checklists and exercises you can do at home to make sure you're absorbing all of these concepts.

Ready to get started? Let's get back to basics!

Gardening Basics


Before we can discuss the intricacies of layering plants within a mixed border, I want to talk about some of the basics of gardening. With a strong foundation to work from, you'll have more success in choosing the plants and reducing the amount of maintenance and care needed.

Your Hardiness Zone



Global Plant Hardiness Zones Map. Tara Krause (CC0 1.0) via Wikimedia Commons.

There's nothing more disappointing to a gardener than planting the perfect plant in the perfect spot, only to watch it wither and die during a cold snap or heat wave. While there are many things that can affect a plant's health, temperature is a pretty decisive factor— one hard freeze and your petunias are goners.



The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Plant Hardiness Zone Map is the standard by which gardeners and growers can determine which plants are most likely to thrive in their area.

The map is based on the average of annual low temperature readings taken from weather stations throughout the United States. Each zone represents a 10° Fahrenheit temperature difference. The Zones are then subdivided into “a” and “b” according to 5° temperature differences within each zone.

The Plant Hardiness Zone Map gives the garden industry a way to communicate the cold hardiness of landscape plants. Zone 1 is the coldest zone and is subject to frost year-round while Zone 11 is the warmest zone and completely frost-free.

This is why when you look at almost any plant label, you’ll see a zone designation, such as “Hardy to Zone 7.” If the label says “Hardy to Zone 7,” that means the plant should survive the winter in zones 7 and warmer.

Take a look at the map above or visit the US Department of Agriculture website at planthardiness.ars.usda.gov to find your plant hardiness zone. You can search by your zip code if you live in the US.

Right Plant, Right Place

I hear all the time from people that they don't have a green thumb. Or that nothing will grow in their terrible soil... Or [insert other problem here]. But, there's no magic thumb color that makes you good or bad at gardening. The truth is that gardening is **part art and part science**. And, the one thing that you cannot avoid if you want to have a successful landscape is that you must put **the right plant in the right place**.

Trust me, no matter WHAT your conditions are, there ARE plants that will grow and thrive there. Even if your home is on a craggy mountainside with terrible soil and high gusting winds. There's actually lots of beautiful plants that will grow and thrive in those conditions.



*These plants all thrive in terrible soil and undesirable conditions. Aren't they beautiful?
Clockwise from top left: Candytuft, Smokebush, Black-eyed Susans, Creeping Thyme, Bart
Cloves (Dianthus), Purple Coneflowers, Wildflower Meadow (Daisies, Asters, Goldenrod, etc.),
Storksbill, Lavender. Amy Fedele (CC0 1.0) via Multiple Sources.*

Identify Plants Just by Looking at Them

What's also cool is that plants have certain features and colors that actually tell you what types of conditions they are suited for. So once you know how to spot these characteristics, you will be able to put the right plant in the right place.

As an example... you wouldn't wear your rain slicker if you were standing in the middle of a desert, right? So... if you put a plant with a built-in rain slicker into drought-like conditions... and expect him to survive and be happy... it's really not your thumb's fault... right?

Here is a quick-reference chart for plant characteristics and what they mean:

CHARACTERISTICS	SUNNY	SHADY	DRY	MOIST	WIND	COLD
Grey/Silver foliage	x		x			
Fleshy foliage	x		x			
Hairy foliage	x		x			
Shiny, THICK leaves	x		x			No
Dark green leaves		x		x		
Matte (unshiny) leaves		x		x		
Big leaves with soft, matte (unshiny) texture		x		x		
Smaller leaves		x	x		Yes	
Glossy leaves		x	x		Yes	

As we all know, rules are meant to be broken. There will always be exceptions to the rules. This is meant to be a guideline to help you make smarter plant decisions and save money. If you look at the scenario in your own garden and something doesn't make sense, spend some time looking at other factors. For example, if you just go by the characteristics of hostas, they should always be positioned in a shady, moist area. But, hostas CAN survive in the full sun if they are given enough water.

There will also be plants that you'll find very difficult to classify. If there aren't obvious clues, look up the country of origin which should tell you a little bit more about the environment it needs to thrive. You can also try to identify the plant using a phone app like Picture This or Google Lens or by asking an employee at the garden center for help.



What Latin Names Tell You About Plants

Latin is also a great way to get more information about plants that are difficult to classify. Don't get nervous, learning a few words and using some common sense will go really far in figuring out the characteristics of your plant by its Latin name. Here are a few Latin words that can really help you determine the characteristics of a plant just by reading its name.

- Alba - white flowers
- Alpina - from the Alps (very hardy)
- Argentea - silvery
- Aurea(s) - yellow flowers
- Australis - from the south/Australia (not frost hardy)
- Chinensis - from China (fairly hardy)
- Coccinea - red flowers or berries
- Columnaris - grows in a column shape
- Decumbens - small growth habit
- Fastigata - upright growth habit
- Gigantea - big for the species (not necessarily huge)
- Glauca - blue foliage
- Grandiflora - large flowers
- Horizontalis - horizontal, spreading habit
- Japonica - from Japan (fairly hardy)
- Latifolia - wide leaves
- Macrocarpa - large fruits
- Marcophylla - large flowers
- Marinus - tolerant of coastal conditions
- Nigra - some part will be black (often the stem)
- Officinalis - has medicinal qualities
- Pendula - foliage hangs down in a “weeping” fashion
- Purpurea - purple foliage or flower
- Repens - low growing, spreads across the ground
- Rosea - pink flowers or sometimes pink foliage
- Rubra - red flowers or foliage
- Variegatus - variegated (two-toned) foliage
- Villosa - hairy

Later in this eBook I'll show you how and where to research the right plants for your conditions. That way, you can choose the right plants for the conditions in your garden and avoid the traps that many homeowners fall into.

Prep Your Layered Garden Beds

When prepping your garden beds, you can go the traditional route, removing the sod, tilling, digging, adding amendments and doing other back-breaking tasks that will make you kinda-sorta hate gardening.

Or you can try the no-dig method.

The first time I heard about creating a garden bed right over the grass, I was (more than) skeptical. Although it sounds too good to be true, the no dig method really does work. I now use this method almost exclusively in my home garden.

No dig gardening is a method created by... well... no one actually knows. It's thought to have originated centuries ago, though! If you want to learn more about the method, Charles Dowding is your man. He has done years and years of testing the results of a no dig vegetable garden vs. a tilled vegetable garden. The results are quite amazing, actually.

The theory behind this method is that when you till the garden you're actually affecting the soil structure and bringing up lots of weed seeds and other things to the surface. If you keep the soil undisturbed, it is actually better for all of the microorganisms and living creatures within the soil... all the things that help to make the soil fertile and good.

What I really like about the no dig method is that you can prepare your beds ahead of time, then plant later. It gives you the flexibility to wait or plant immediately with minimal effort on your part.


The basic steps to creating a no-dig garden bed are as follows:

1. Measure bed and calculate materials
2. Prep the bed
3. Lay paper
4. Cover with compost
5. Top with mulch
6. Plant

1- Measure bed and calculate materials

The first step is to figure out exactly how large your new flower garden bed will be. Measure the length and width of the space using a tape measure or flexible landscape tape.

With dimensions in hand, [head over to this website](#) to determine how much compost and mulch you'll need to fill your new bed. It will also give you estimated costs related to the materials.



As an example, if you have a bed that's 10 feet long by 10 feet deep, you will need about 250 ft² of cardboard, 0.5 yd³ of compost (at 1.5" depth), 1 yd³ of mulch (at 3" depth).

2- Clear the area

If you're starting with a really rough area, you should remove any noxious weeds like ivy, blackberry, bermuda grass, oxalis, etc. and larger sticks and rocks to start with a clean slate. If your new bed is covering up a lawn area, you shouldn't have much work to do to clean up the area.

3- Prep the bed

The only bit of digging you'll actually need to do is create an edge around your bed area. Using a sharp spade, cut a straight line around your bed to at least a 4" depth. Then, from inside of the bed area, cut a diagonal line at least 6" from the perimeter down to the depth of your first pass to create a "V" notch. This will keep all of your soil and mulch inside of your bed. It also helps to prevent your grass from growing into the garden bed area.

Use a hose to heavily saturate the entire garden bed to jump-start the "no dig" process. After each step moving forward, you will saturate the bed area again.

4 - Lay paper

Lay uncoated cardboard right over your grass in a cross-hatch pattern, making sure that every inch is covered (no gaps). Remove any shiny plastic or tape from recycled cardboard. If you are concerned about weed pressure, I recommend using 1-2 layers of recycled cardboard.

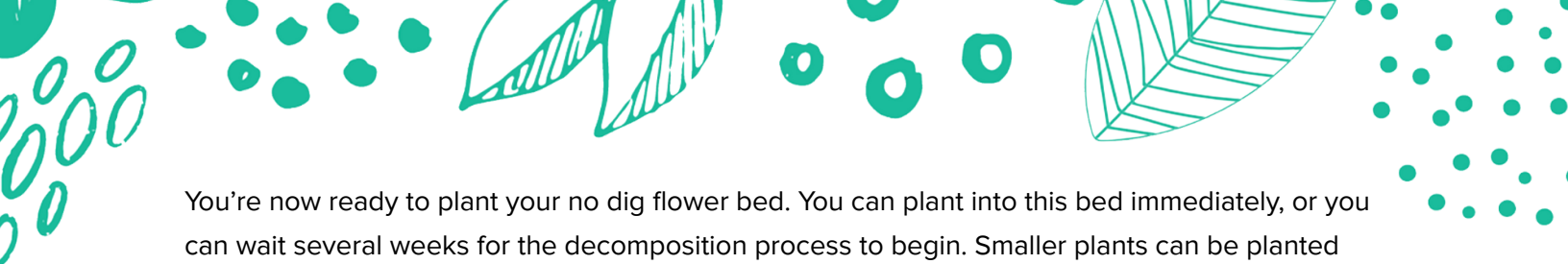
Saturate the paper layer with water. This will hold it in place and also start the decomposition process. The water may roll off the paper at first. If that happens, wait a few minutes, then go back and saturate it again. Repeat as needed.

5- Cover with compost & mulch

Next you'll just spread the compost right over top of the cardboard. Usually at this point I try not to walk on the bed too much. I would start in the middle with the compost and work your way out to the edges. Put a layer of compost at least 1.5" thick (you can add more if you'd like to). Saturate the compost layer with water.

Top the compost with a 2-3" layer of coarse mulch; a mix of wood chips and leaves and will work very well. Saturate the mulch layer with water.

6- Plant



You're now ready to plant your no dig flower bed. You can plant into this bed immediately, or you can wait several weeks for the decomposition process to begin. Smaller plants can be planted right into the compost layer. As they grow, their roots will break through the decomposing paper.

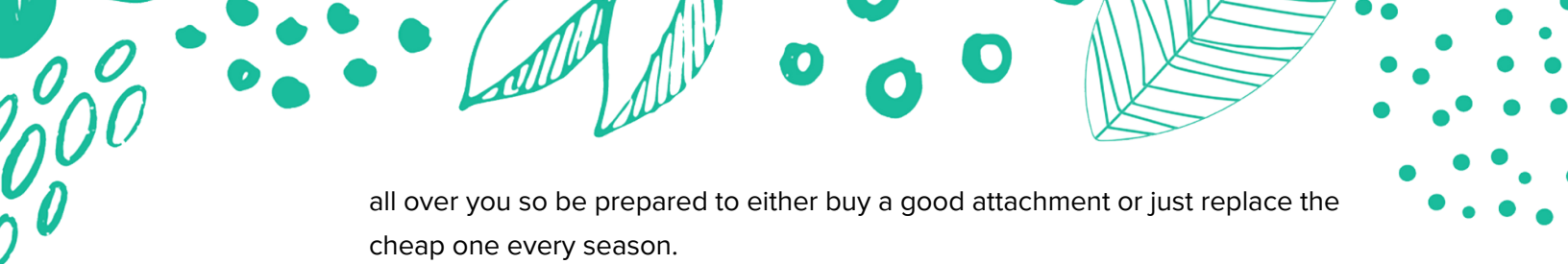
To plant large shrubs or trees, poke a hole through the paper layer, dig a hole and plant. Mix some organic matter with your native soil in the planting hole.

Finally, water in your plants and enjoy your no-dig garden bed.

Gardening Tools

Here are some useful tools that every gardener should have. For links to all of my favorite tools and brands, visit [pretypurpledoor.com/gardening-resources](https://www.prettypurpledoor.com/gardening-resources).

- **Trowels:** You can pick up small garden trowels for as cheap as \$1 in your neighborhood. It's nice to have a few different types of trowels. As you learn more about gardening, it's nice to invest in some high quality tools, like ones from Dewit.
- **Pruning Shears:** In addition to trowels, you'll also need to do some pruning, snipping and cutting. Pruning shears, or secateurs, are a must for every gardener. I like the shears made by Fiskars for a nice mid-level quality option. To get yourself started, buy (1) bypass pruning shears and (2) hand pruning shears with straight blades.
- **Shovel:** A really good shovel can also cost as much as \$30-40. But, purchasing something high-quality will save you a lot of time and frustration in the long run if you plan to do a lot of gardening. My favorite shovel for planting is the Fiskars transplanting spade. It's really great for women because the shovel is narrow... makes it easier to dig. A regular shovel works fine, too.
- **Gloves:** There are so many gardening gloves to choose from. But for regular hobby gardening, I recommend the little cotton gloves that have rubber on the palm and finger areas. You can usually get a pack of 6 pretty cheap... and I'd rather have these because if they get really messed up I can just throw them away rather than trying to save them.
- **Watering Tools:** A watering can or a hose with attachment to reach your plant is a must.
 - Watering can: Personal preference here; think about how heavy the can will be. Mine are in the 2.5 gallon range. Also consider what type of spout is most appropriate for your situation. A sprinkle spout may look appealing but I find the small openings to be much more practical for watering the roots of the plant without getting the foliage wet.
 - Hose attachments: I am a big fan of the all metal options with different spraying options. But, the plastic ones will work fine too. Eventually they'll end up leaking



all over you so be prepared to either buy a good attachment or just replace the cheap one every season.

- **Bucket/Small Bin:** This is useful for so many reasons. I use buckets and bins to pot plants, mix my soil, move transplants around and to pull weeds. I really like the Argee potting trays. A bucket (2-5 gallons) also works fine!
- **Compost:** You can purchase a bag of this at the garden center or make your own.
- **Mulch:** You can purchase a bag at the garden center or use straw, grass clippings or leaves.

Planting Your First Plant

Now that you have your materials and your plant on hand, you're ready to put your plant into the ground!

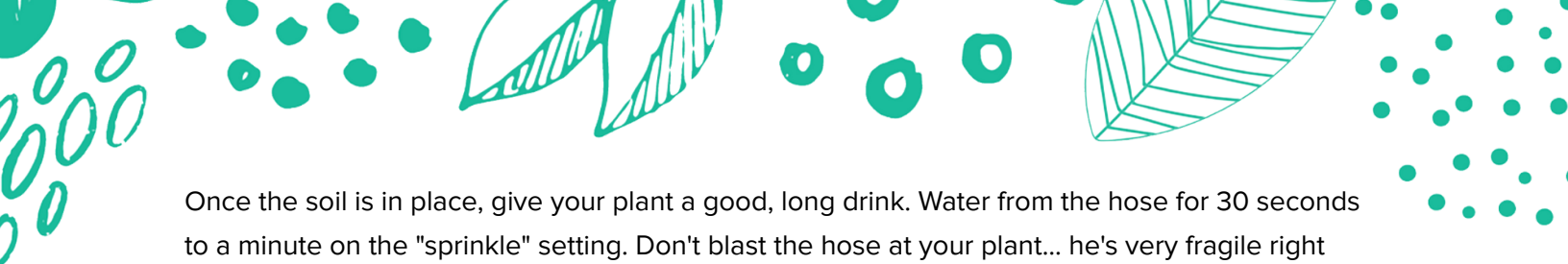
The first step to getting your plant into the ground is to prepare your garden bed area. You will either be starting a brand new garden bed in the grass. I already covered my "preferred" method for preparing a garden bed (the no-dig method). I would recommend trying it! If you already have an existing garden bed at your house but you've never planted in it, just sweep existing mulch or other debris away from your planting area.

Next, dig a hole for your plant. Make the hole as deep as the plant's pot, but twice as wide as the plant pot. This will give your plant some room to establish and for its roots to grow outward.

Take the soil from the hole that you just dug, and put it into a bucket or small bin. Mix an equal amount of compost into your soil. This will feed your plant so that it has enough nutrients to grow strong roots. If you are using the "no-dig" method described above, you can skip this step because you already did it.

Put your plant into the center of your hole. Make sure that your plant is planted in the hole at the same height as it was in your pot. If your plant is sitting higher than ground level you'll need to remove it and dig down a little further. If your plant is too deep in the hole, put some soil back into the bottom of the hole until the place where the soil meets your plant in the pot is level with the ground. Planting too deep is one of the biggest mistakes I see beginner gardeners make. This can injure or kill your plant... so take your time getting this right.

Once your plant is positioned at the right height, you'll surround the plant with that nice mixture of native soil and compost that you've just made. Don't mound the soil up higher than how it was positioned. Just push down around the plant to make sure that it's secure in the hole. You don't have to pack down the soil so hard that you can't move it around.



Once the soil is in place, give your plant a good, long drink. Water from the hose for 30 seconds to a minute on the "sprinkle" setting. Don't blast the hose at your plant... he's very fragile right now. You can also water the plant with a watering can. Water at the base of the plant and keep the leaves dry. If you get the leaves wet, you can introduce different types of fungal diseases.

Sometimes after your plant is watered, the soil will settle a little bit. That's because the water will weigh down the soil and remove any air pockets that are in the soil, which is a good thing. After watering, use your hands to tamp down the soil around the plant again. Add some more of your compost/soil mix if needed to fill the hole back up so the soil is level with the ground.

Then, cover the soil around the plant with your mulch. You can use a 3" layer and expand it around the area of your plant. Mulch helps your plant to retain moisture so it doesn't dry out. It's also a great way to suppress any weeds from growing in your garden bed. Make sure that the stem of your plant is not touching the mulch. Leave a gap of two or three inches between the stem and the mulch. Again, if you're using the "no-dig" method you've already added the mulch. Just make sure that the mulch isn't touching any of your plant stems.

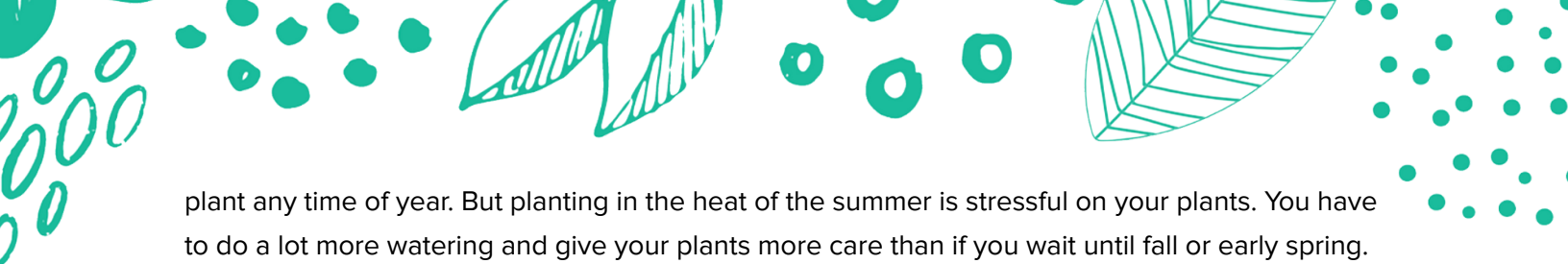
You should water your plants regularly for at least the first 2-4 weeks after planting. It will be very fragile at first-- even if it's a tough, drought-tolerant plant. If it's very hot and dry, water your plant every day in the morning and the evening. If the weather is moderate, you can probably water every two or three days in the morning or the evening.

After this 2-4 weeks, your plant should be established. Once your plants are established, most need about 1" of water each week (this amount includes the amount of water from the rain, too). A rain gauge is an easy way to determine how much rain water your plants get in one week. They are very reasonably priced and take the guesswork out of watering.

When to Plant a Plant

It's better to do your planting in the early morning or evening, when the sun isn't going to dry them out. It's recommended to plant in early spring or in the fall.

To get a better idea of when to plant in your particular climate, head to the [Farmer's Almanac First and Last Frost Dates calculator](#). When you enter your city or zipcode, it will tell you when you can typically expect the last spring frost date as well as the first fall frost date in your area. Use these dates as a guide as it can always frost earlier or later. In the spring, I usually wait an additional 2 weeks past the last spring frost date. In the fall, plan to plant at least 6 weeks before the first fall frost date. This will give your plants time to establish roots before it gets too cold. You can also



plant any time of year. But planting in the heat of the summer is stressful on your plants. You have to do a lot more watering and give your plants more care than if you wait until fall or early spring.

Planning Your Layered Landscape

Before you can get to planting your layered landscape, you first have to do some planning. The planning stage can be frustrating for many beginner gardeners who want to skip to the “fun” part. But I challenge you to accept this stage openly and put a lot of thought into the decisions you make.

With proper planning, choosing the right plants will be much simpler and ultimately your layered landscape will be much more successful. The main steps to planning your layered landscape are:

1. Understanding the basics of landscape layering.
2. Choosing a garden style or theme.
3. Refining your color palette.
4. Learning how to research plants.

What is Landscape Layering?

Layering is the key to an amazing landscape. The easiest way to think about landscape layering is to break each garden bed down into 3 "layers"— the background, the middle-ground and the foreground.

Layering also involves considering principles like repetition, texture, scale and flow. The ultimate goal is to create a beautiful mixed border filled with trees, shrubs, plants, flowers, vines and more that will connect your background, middle-ground and foreground together so it looks like one single planting.



Mixed border with orange and violet flowers, Aldsworth House Open Garden, West Sussex. Mark Wordy (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.

Keep in mind that the more plants and flowers you choose for your mixed border, the more maintenance you'll need to do to keep your landscaping looking its best. **Trees and shrubs require a lot less maintenance** than perennial plants and flowers.

Every time I see a homeowner tear out their foundation planting of evergreen shrubs and replace it with a small group of flowering plants, I wish I could go back in time and stop them. Not only does this remove the structure that holds a garden together, it also creates a lot more maintenance and upkeep. Add in the fact that most homeowners don't take the time to research their plants and cite them correctly... and you quickly create a really miserable situation.

This problem, although incredibly common, is fortunately 100% avoidable. Hopefully after reading this guide you will not fall victim to this same mistake and grow to love gardening more and more each season. I know that gardening is an amazing hobby and creative outlet that will continue to reward me for the rest of my life. And, I want the same for you.

When layering is done right, it just looks like a lush garden. Anyone can put tall plants in the back and short plants in the front, but with a little more effort you can take a space from good to amazing.



*Flowering garden with winding path..
Tina T (CC0 1.0) via Unsplash.*

Garden Styles

When creating a layered landscape, the garden style you choose will determine the layout of your borders and even some of the plants that you'll choose. To simplify things, I like to break down garden styles into just four main categories: traditional, modern/contemporary, cottage and natural. Let's learn a little bit about each.

Traditional Garden Style



Dave Catchpole (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.

The perfect garden for colonial, Italian and French inspired architecture, traditional garden styles focus on symmetry and balance. When I think of a traditional garden, I picture a very formal garden with strong architectural features, wide expanses of perfectly trimmed lawn, rows of orderly clipped hedges, framed views of stone fountains and cleanly edged walkways.

Dominated by green lawn spaces that are balanced by green trees and green shrubs, traditional garden styles are usually not filled with color. Many times you'll see traditional gardens using only white as an accent color.

If you like the balance and symmetry offered by traditional gardens but don't want yours to be so "uptight," you can certainly borrow elements of the formal garden design to incorporate into your own garden.

Traditional gardens don't have to be as strict as my explanation, though. Some garden designers will label cottage gardens in the traditional category of garden design. Personally, I think this can get a bit confusing so we'll cover cottage garden styles separately.



Mark Wordy (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.

Elements of Traditional Gardens

- Symmetry through the repetition of the same plantings on either side of the yard or walkway.
- Straight lines, straight paths and bold geometric forms
- Horizontal expanses of green manicured lawn.
- Formal hedges pruned into repetitive shapes

Plants for Traditional Gardens

Columnar trees such as 'Blue Arrow' Juniper (Zones 4-9) and 'Hix' Yew (Zones 4-7) and boxwood shrubs as hedging are all signatures of the traditional garden style.

Roses, peonies and tulips each represent a different aspect of this strong floral legacy. Some of my favorites are the rambling groundcover 'Apricot Drift' Rose (Zones 4-11), 'Coral Supreme' Peony (Zones 3-7) and hardy 'Orange Emperor' Tulips (Zones 3-8).

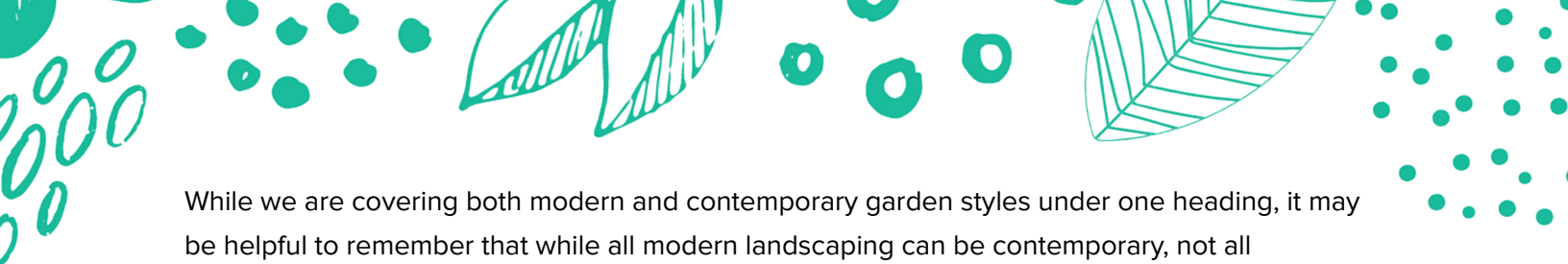
Modern/Contemporary Garden Style



Sarah Price (CC BY-SA 2.0) via Flickr.

Each generation tends to get a bit trendier. So while cottage gardens are still a popular garden style choice, modern and contemporary garden styles have grown in popularity.

In modern and contemporary garden design, the perfect symmetry of geometric shapes of traditional gardens is replaced by asymmetrical, sometimes interlocking, lawn and patio shapes.



While we are covering both modern and contemporary garden styles under one heading, it may be helpful to remember that while all modern landscaping can be contemporary, not all contemporary designs are modern.

Let's take a look at the difference between the two.

Modern design style is typically better suited for commercial property and contemporary design lends itself to residential property.

Modern landscape can be defined as clean-lined, hard-edged and minimalistic. Modern design style is characterized by heavy uses of metal, concrete and monochromatic or pale color palettes. Modern design focuses heavily on the function of the materials rather than nature.

Contemporary style comes from modern design, but tends to be a more natural and softer version. In contemporary design, what is "already in place" is taken into consideration and enhanced. The use of curves and wooden accents and strategically placed/contained bright flowers are welcomed. But remember that less is always more.

The focus of contemporary gardens is on leisure and entertaining; the 'outdoor room' is at the heart of this garden style. The materials used for hard surfaces typically take center stage over the planting.

Elements of Modern/Contemporary Gardens

- Geometric-shaped precast concrete stepping stones are common in modern and contemporary garden styles because they're highly versatile and inexpensive.
- Architectural sculptures or planters made from concrete, resin or ceramic in gray or bold colors are a great choice to mimic and contrast the shapes in your modern garden.
- Metal, whether it's metal grids, sheet metal or even galvanized steel can help to carry out the modern look of this garden style. Just make sure there's no patina or rust to the metal to maintain that clean, contemporary look.
- Water features like ponds and fountains with clean lines and geometric shapes are a staple in modern garden styles.





An Asian aesthetic informs the garden of this Ansley Park home. Inspired by mountain scenes and Japanese conifers, boulders, rushing water features and colorful alpine perennials. Alongside colorful walkway designs influenced by early modern garden masters, an artistic arrangement of brick and natural stone represents flowing water. A diversity of textures, colors and surfaces integrate aspects of modern and contemporary garden architecture. Garden design by Matthew Klyn. Thomas Wolff (CC BY-ND 2.0) via Flickr.

Plants For Modern/Contemporary Gardens

Trees in a contemporary garden tend to have a more upright habit, so they become a structural element. Their canopies are not too large, and there may be several in a row to create a hedge effect. For example, a Japanese Maple (*Acer palmatum*) has an attractive shape that is a standout as a specimen tree in modern/contemporary garden styles.

Plants for modern/contemporary gardens are all about structure and form. Try ‘Sapphire Skies Beaked Blue’ Yucca (Zones 5-10) for it’s blue globe-shaped spiky foliage with white flowers. Aeonium (Zones 4-9), a succulent known for its fleshy leaves and geometric shape is another

great plant for the modern garden style. Ornamental grasses with bold stature are also great for modern/contemporary gardens. Golden Japanese forest grass (Zones 4-9), a low-growing shade-tolerant mounding grass that can be used as a groundcover in your modern garden.

Cottage Garden Style



This pink, purple and blue blooming border combines plants at different sizes, shapes and heights to create interest (Chippenham Park Gardens, Freckenham, England). Karen Roe (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.

Country cottage garden style is the relaxed and sometimes unruly offspring of the formal/traditional garden style. In cottage gardens, there's much less emphasis placed on the symmetry or positioning of plants. Throughout this guide, you'll learn lots of tips and tricks to get your home gardening feeling cottage-like and cozy.

The cottage garden design style incorporates dense informal masses of edibles, herbs, medicinals and ornamental plantings using traditional-style hardscape materials. The earliest cottage gardens in England were grown for very practical purposes. Over time, a colorful mixture of blooming flowers has become the centerpiece rather than the afterthought of the cottage garden style.

The freeform style of cottage gardens is absolutely beautiful— and happens to be my personal favorite of the garden styles. But, because there are very few rules in the country cottage garden style, it can be challenging to get it right.



Pink, purple and blue mixed border, Mottisfont Abbey & Gardens, Hampshire. Many elements of cottage gardens are incorporated into this design, including informal plantings spilling over border edges and natural brick walls covered with climbers. Mark Wordy (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.

Elements of Cottage Gardens

Above all, your garden must appeal to you personally. Fill it up with the plants, flowers, edibles, herbs, scents and colors you love. Cottage gardens are gardens “of the heart, of the hearth and of the home.” Here are some elements that make up a cottage garden:

- Informal plantings that appear “randomly placed” with very little open space.
- Walls and fences covered with climbing plants and vines
- Natural materials like brick, gravel, decomposed stone and mulch used for pathways.
- Plants that spill onto paths and over fences to “soften” the edges.
- Ornamental plants mixed together with medicinal and edible plants

Plants in country cottage gardens are colorful and diverse, with a tendency to spill over into lawns and paths. Fill your cottage garden with collections of your favorite flowers and plants that are both beautiful and practical. The cottage garden features colorful ornamentals, edible vegetables and fruits, herbs and medicinals all mixed together as one. Plantings utilize every available space, creating a feeling of charm and “organized mess.”



A mixture of cottage style plants in purples and pinks, including lambs ears, geranium, catmint, salvia, scabiosas, daisies and more in the stunning Town Place Garden in Danehill, England, UK. Mark Wordy (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.

Plants For Cottage Gardens

Cottage garden plants are not rare and exotic. Most flowering perennials and shrubs fit well in this look. Among them are American natives and ordinary species. Many old-fashioned flowering shrubs such as hydrangeas, roses, lilacs and trees, such as magnolias will suit the cottage garden style. Most of all, pick plants that you love. A few to try are clematis vines (Zones 3-9), creeping phlox (Zone 3-9), [Shasta daisies](#) (Zones 3-8) and [coneflowers](#) (Zone 4-8). Mix in rosemary, sweet

bay, sage, lavender, blueberry, figs, grapes and pomegranates with your ornamentals for a cottage garden that will look, smell and taste amazing.

Natural Garden Style



Naturalistic planting at RHS Wisley Gardens, England. John K Thorne (CC0 1.0) via Flickr.

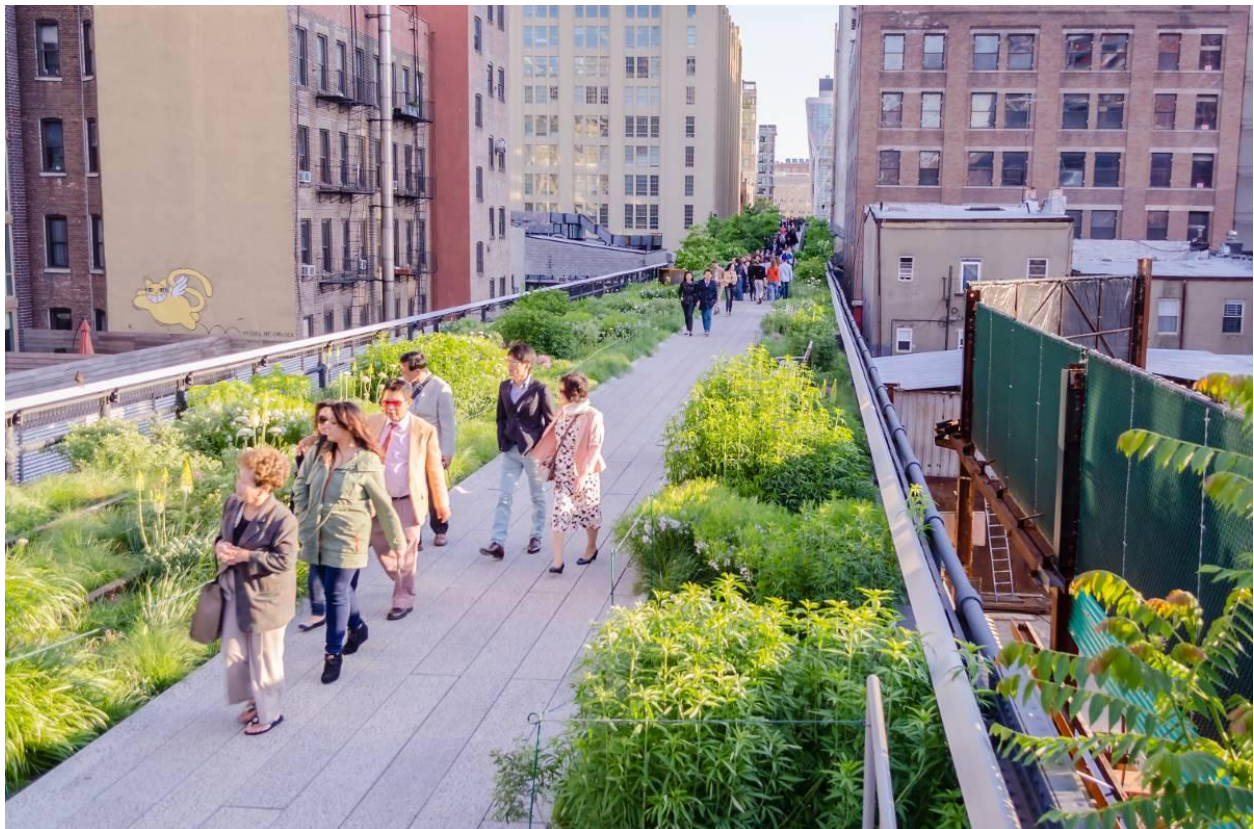
Natural garden style, also referred to as naturalistic or new perennial style, relies heavily on native plant choices, which will vary depending on where you live. Unlike the clipped hedging of traditional gardens, a naturalistic garden is rooted in plant selection, taking into account both ecology and design. One of the inherent goals of a naturalistic garden is to conserve resources and reduce environmental footprint. When done right, natural garden designs blend seamlessly with nature. They are designed to appear as if they weren't designed; as if mother nature accidentally created a breathtaking combination of color, texture and form for us to enjoy.

Elements of Natural Gardens

A natural garden reflects the natural landscape that surrounds it, whether it's the prairies of the Midwest, the forests of New England, the fields of wildflowers in Texas or the starkly beautiful deserts of the Southwest. One of the inherent goals of a naturalistic garden is to conserve resources and reduce our environmental footprint.

Gone are the 'clean' lines and smooth surfaces. Material choices in natural gardens are rustic to suit the wild and free planting. Unlike the clipped hedging of traditional gardens, a naturalistic garden is rooted in plant selection, taking into account both ecology and design.

Natural design style may look haphazard, but that's far from the truth. The visual emphasis of new perennial style is on structure and form rather than color. The aim is to select proven, long-lived, robust plants that don't require a lot of maintenance and "die elegantly" as [Piet Oudolf says](#).



A fantastic example of natural garden style is the New York City High Line, a 1.5 mile long public park built on a historic freight rail line, elevated above the streets on Manhattan's West Side. It was designed by Dutch plantsman Piet Oudolf. (Deposit Standard) via Deposit Photos.

Plants For Natural Gardens

Natural gardens rely heavily on native plant choices, which will vary depending on where you live. Some plant choices recommended by Greg Loades in a Fine Gardening article are: moor grass, black-eye susans, New England aster and sneezeweed.

Mixing Garden Styles

You can mix garden styles, too. This is a great example of a traditional + cottage style garden.



Pink, blue and white mixed border with a clipped, formal hedgerow along a straight path combines cottage and traditional garden styles. Mottisfont Abbey Garden, Hampshire, Mark Wordy (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.

But if basic garden styles aren't enough guidance, you can try incorporating a garden theme into your design for a truly unique space.



Garden Themes

Sometimes, choosing a general garden style is not enough to make your layered landscape come to life and ooze with your personality. A garden can reflect your hobbies, fashion styles, collections, favorite foods, favorite sports teams, favorite color and more!

Why Choose a Theme?

It focuses your design: If you are struggling with where to start, a garden theme can definitely help you to get your creative juices flowing and help you narrow down options for plant choices and materials. Garden designs are usually much stronger with a clear focus and a theme will do just that.

It tells a personal story: A theme can help you tell your personal story through your garden. It gives you the opportunity to make the garden space uniquely you and insert your personality into the design in fun and unexpected ways.

In Rochelle Greayer's book, *Cultivating Garden Style*, she explores many different garden themes that are much more specific than the basic garden style categories already discussed. Most of the themes are a combination of two different concepts, brought together to form a unique style. A few examples are **enchanted bohemian, plush yogo, forest temple and Hollywood froufrou**. The book also provides photo examples and furniture and decor suggestions for each of the 24 themes.

In Lisa Nunamaker's eBook, *the Peanut Butter & Jelly Garden*, she mentions traditional garden themes like **rose gardens, moon gardens, wildlife gardens, children's gardens and cutting gardens**. She also provides some out-of-the-ordinary garden theme examples such as **pop art punch, french prairie, martini garden**.

She even designs an example garden based off of a Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwich theme so you can see how it's done.

As you can see, the possibilities for garden themes are endless and can be a lot of fun!



Color Schemes

A mistake new gardeners often make is running to the garden center and choosing lots of pretty plants without thinking about the colors that you want in your landscape. But, today we are thinking like a garden designer and resisting the urge to do this, right? Choosing your colors ahead of time will greatly improve the overall look of your landscape.

My best tip is to **start with one single color** for your garden. I know that sounds boring but building up a color scheme from one base color is the easiest way to use color in a controlled way.

Color plays such an important role in the way we feel. Depending on the color “temperature” you choose, colors in your garden can evoke different emotions and moods. So, it’s important to first decide what type of feeling, or energy, you want to convey with your garden by choosing warm or cool colors.

Colors & Their Meanings

Understanding how different colors work together is an important part of making your garden look more cohesive and professional. Did you know that colors can evoke different emotions in a person? This is one of my favorite things about color; it can help you to set the tone and tell a story in your garden.

That means that the plants you choose can be really important! Not only that, you can use color in other areas of your landscape... like on your front door, planters/containers, furniture and even sculptures or lawn ornaments. There's so much opportunity to incorporate color into your garden.

Here are just some of the meanings of colors you may choose for your garden. I tried to include mostly positive emotions of these colors... but there's usually positive AND negative emotions associated with every color.

- Red: Passion, Drama, Love, Anger
- Orange: Encouragement, Energy, Happiness, Warmth, Enthusiasm
- Yellow: Optimism, Youthful, Happiness, Hope, Confidence
- Pink: Sensitivity, Tranquility, Tenderness, Safety
- Green: New Beginnings, Health, Refreshing, Restful, Abundance, Nature
- Blue: Trust, Calm, Serenity, Peace, Aloof, Sadness (can also suppress appetite)
- Purple: Creativity, Spirituality, Reflection, Compassion, Luxury, Wealth, Calmness, Prosperity

- Black: Mystery, Elegance, Barrier, Sexy, Formal, Sophisticated, Secretive, Evil
- Gray: Moody, Conservative, Neutral, Stable (gray is considered to be unemotional)
- White: Purity, Cleanliness, Virtue, Freshness
- Brown: Reassurance, Wholesomeness, Dependability
- Cream: Calm, Elegant, Purity

As you can see, color plays an important role in the way we feel. This is why it's such an important element of design; whether you're designing a garden, a logo, a website, a brochure or a piece of art.



In addition to the meaning of specific colors, colors can also have a temperature (warm or cool).

Depending on the color “temperature” you choose, colors in your garden can evoke different emotions and moods. So, decide what type of feeling, or energy, you want to convey with your garden. The easiest way to do this is by choosing warm or cool colors.

Warm colors are on one side of the color wheel, while cool colors are the other side. Some warm colors

are: yellow, orange and red. Some cool colors are green, blue and purple.

But it's important to note any color and be warm or cool. Chartreuse is a warm green because it has warm, yellow undertones. Teal is a cool green because it has cool, blue undertones.

Relaxing & Calm Colors



Cool purple and blue blooms line this casual path and create a relaxing, calm vibe, Parham House & Gardens, West Sussex. Mark Wordy (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.

Do you want a garden that's relaxing and calm? For peaceful gardens, you want to keep the color temperature cool and the contrast to a minimum. Minimal contrast is achieved by choosing colors that are right next to each other on the color wheel.

Blue, violet and teal is an example of a cool color scheme with minimal contrast. White is another calm and relaxing color that you can use!

Vibrant & Energizing Colors

Do you want a garden that's vibrant and energizing? For exciting gardens, keep the color temperature warm and amp up the contrast. Colors like red, orange and yellow and chartreuse provide warm vibrance and energy.



This red, orange and yellow mixed border is vibrant and full of energy, Loseley Park Garden, Surrey. Mark Wordy (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.

Add Excitement To Your Color Scheme

Sometimes, staying warm or cool with your color scheme is not enough. One of the easiest ways to amp up the excitement in your garden color palette is to use complimentary colors.

Complementary colors are opposites and bring out the vibrance of each other when placed next to each other in a garden. On the color wheel, complementary colors are directly across from each other. For example: purple & yellow, green & red or blue & orange.



PURPLE & YELLOW



GREEN & RED



BLUE & ORANGE





Define Your Garden Style, Theme & Color Scheme

Think about the type of garden style that you want in your landscape and do some research on that particular style before you begin.

Browse through books or visit websites like [pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com) or [houzz.com](https://www.houzz.com) to begin curating photos of landscapes that you like. Just type in some keywords and start to collect photos that you are attracted to. Then, review your saved photos and look for patterns and trends in the photos you chose. Do your photos have anything in common? Like...

- Colors of the plants or features.
- Styles of the gardens you tend to like (modern, traditional, cottage and new perennial are common garden styles).
- Themes represented.
- Types of plants used (all contain roses, succulents, structural evergreen shrubs or beautiful flowering trees).
- Hardscape or features used (brick pathways, bird baths, water features, stone edging, etc.).

When choosing a style, also **consider your own lifestyle and the time you have to maintain your garden**. Some garden styles (and individual plants) are low maintenance, while other styles and plants require a lot of upkeep (clipping, trimming, pruning, feeding, etc.) to keep them looking nice. There's no such thing as a zero maintenance garden; all gardens require maintenance and upkeep to varying degrees.

So, before you decide that you want a traditional garden with 17 topiaries clipped into the shapes of woodland creatures, **be honest with yourself**. Make sure that you are willing to dedicate the time and energy it takes to keep that type of garden looking nice. If you are looking for a low maintenance garden, choose more trees, large shrubs and bulbs for your garden. These layers generally require less maintenance and care than perennial plants and flowers do.



Plant Research

As you go through the process of planning and designing your layered landscape, use the resources in this section to learn more about your plants, narrow down selections and ensure that you're choosing the right plant for your specific site conditions.

I often struggle with even providing plant lists for new gardeners. The reasoning is simple. Just because a plant works in my garden, does not mean that it's an ideal choice for your garden. Plant choices are personal and unique to each gardener; what your needs are, how much time you have, what style you want and your own personal opinion of what looks "good." That's why it's so important to conduct your own research before you purchase any tree, shrub or plant. While plant lists can be a great jumping off point to get your research started, do not rely on another gardener's plant list unless they live right next door. And even then, I would still encourage you to do your own research before planting anything in your garden.

In addition to personal preference, plants can often behave differently in different climates and conditions. Some plants are invasive in certain regions or can spread aggressively and take over if provided the perfect conditions to do so. These plants are sometimes referred to as "thugs" of the garden.

Over the years I've realized that the terms invasive and aggressive hold very different meanings for different gardeners. Many use the term invasive for plants that are native and prolific spreaders, which is not correct (invasive is a term reserved strictly for non-native species). Some gardeners will warn that a particular plant is aggressive or difficult to control, taking over their entire garden with no possible way to eradicate the plant to matter what you do. While sometimes these warnings are legitimate (like with bamboo, wisteria and many others), other times I've come to the conclusion that their version of "aggressive" must be very, very different from mine. Or, perhaps our conditions are just different so the plant is well-behaved in my garden while it wreaks havoc on theirs. It's hard to say for sure if the differences are of opinion or of climate/conditions.

That's why I strongly recommend that you do your own plant research.

I know that researching plants can be a daunting (and even somewhat boring) task. But, it's one of the things that separates the amateur-looking gardens from the magazine-worthy ones. Just like any other hobby, in gardening you must develop your skills and knowledge in order to grow and improve as a gardener.

Luckily, there are lots of resources in this section to help you. The two easiest ways to begin your plant research are:

1. Identify plants "in the wild" with cell phone apps.

2. Use online plant databases to find ideal plants for your conditions.

Let's learn a little bit about each of these research methods, along with some great tools to make the job easier.

Identify Plants in the Wild (Phone Apps)

The first is to find plants you like in your neighborhood/area. If you spot a plant nearby, chances are that you can also incorporate it into your own garden because the conditions are likely to be similar. If the soil down the street is acidic and sandy, it's a pretty good bet that your soil is similar. So, a lot of the plants growing and thriving in your own neighborhood will work in your garden, too! This really takes a lot of the guesswork out of plant research.

But, once you see the plant, how do you identify it so that you can purchase it?

Obviously you can ask the owner... which is always my preferred option and a great way to make a gardening friend, too! But, if they aren't available you can try using an app on your cell phone. Using a plant identification app, you can snap a photo of the plant to find its name. There are many, many options available. But, there are only two free apps that I personally recommend because I find them to be accurate and the least annoying with ads and other distractions.



A cell phone app can help you to identify plants that you see in your neighborhood, like these *bleeding hearts*. Unknown (CC0 1.0) via Pexels.

- [Google Lens App](#) - With this app you can identify plants from any photo with the power of Google! It does a lot of other great stuff, too.
- Right Plants App - [Android](#) | [iOS \(iPhone\)](#)



Research Plants For Your Garden (Online Plant Databases)

The second option is to do your research online. Once you know the conditions of your garden and a few features of the plant you're looking for, you can find a lot of great options online. I like to use plant databases for this purpose.

Here are some of my favorite databases for plant research.

- [Garden.org Plants Database](#) - search for plants by plant habit, water needs, sun tolerance and seasonal interest.
- [Right Plants Database](#) - search for plants by color, bloom time, soil type, sun tolerance and more. This is a UK site so it doesn't have hardiness zones but will tell you how cold hardy plants are (in Celsius) - There's also an app for your phone!
- [Daves Garden Plant Database](#) - This database includes over 160,000 plants along with comments from other gardeners who have grown them.
- [Missouri Botanical Garden Plant Finder](#)
- [Garden.org Advanced Search by Characteristics](#)

Another option for conducting plant research is online plant nurseries. Online nursery websites will usually have filters and features built into the website so that you can find (and purchase) the right plant. Even if you don't intend to buy your plants online, you can still use the nursery website to do your research.

I am fond of [NatureHills.com](#) for all types of plants and shrubs and [JohnnySeeds.com](#) for researching flowers and other plants from seed. I love all of the filters on the Nature Hills website and their very large plant selection makes it an excellent option for plant research. This website even has special sections for deer resistant plants, fast growing shrubs, unique perennials and much more. The growing information and plant details on the Johnny's Seeds website (and their actual seed packets) is second to none. I often use this website to look up plant details and care information on plants I already have in my garden.

Specialty Research Resources

Here are some other helpful resources that you can use when conducting more specific plant research. For example, plant toxicity, origin or other behavior.

- [ASPCA Poisonous Plants List](#) - If you have dogs, cats or horses, cross-reference your plant choice with this database to make sure it's safe for your pets.

- [Izel Native Plants Database](#) - Search native plants list by native range, hardiness zone, light requirements, soil type, bloom time, color and more. There's also separate categories for grasses, perennials, trees & shrubs, ferns, climbers, etc.
- [Invasive Plant List](#) - Before introducing a new plant to your garden, check the "Introduced, Invasive and Noxious Plants" list on the [USDA.gov website](#) to ensure the plant isn't invasive where you live.

This is probably common sense, but it's worth mentioning that you can Google questions about a particular plant. For example:

- "Is Tickseed toxic to cats?"
- "Is Mountain Mint native to the US?"
- "Is Bugleweed invasive (or aggressive)?"

You can search the common name like the examples above, but if you want to be *really* sure, type in the plant's scientific or botanical name. For example:

- *Coreopsis grandiflora* 'Heliot' instead of Tickseed.
- *Pycnanthemum virginianum* instead of Mountain Mint.
- *Ajuga reptans* 'Black Scallop' instead of Bugleweed.

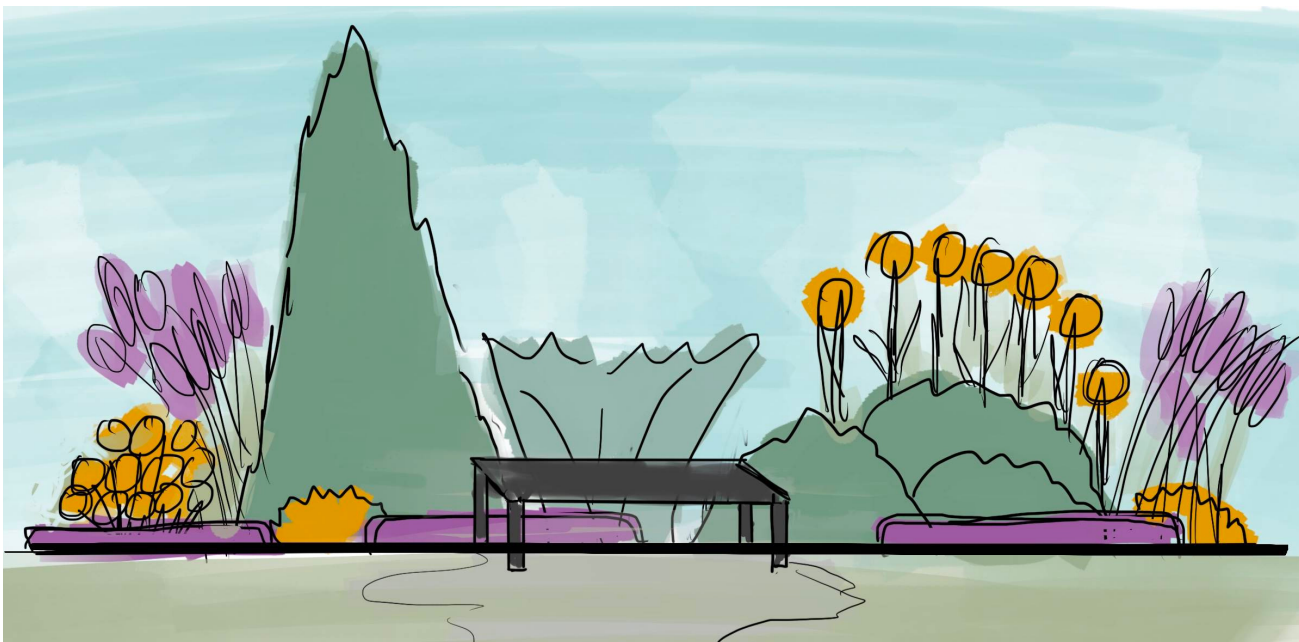
Lastly, my printable [Garden Planning Worksheets](#) are a great tool for planning your layered landscape to ensure 4-season color and interest along with enough plants from each section of the Planting Pyramid.

Landscape Layering: Step-By-Step

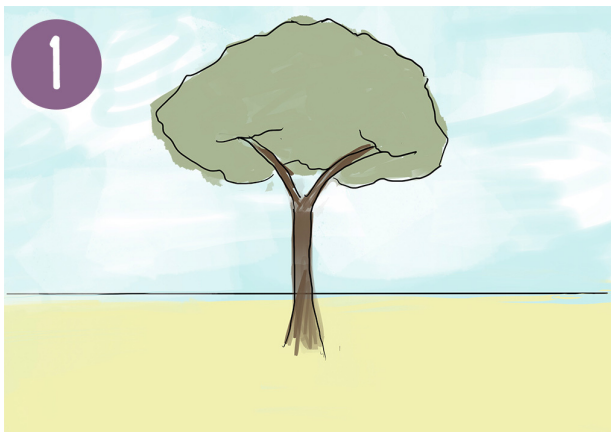
The mixed border or layered landscape concept can be used to landscape every part of your property; from the edges to foundation, to shady nooks and sunny spots. By creating a backbone of small trees and shrubs, then mixing perennials, groundcovers, bulbs and vines within them, you will create year-round continuity and four-season interest in your landscape.

A mixed border can have a formal or informal design, but it should always follow the principles of design and the planting pyramid to provide color and interest throughout the entire year.

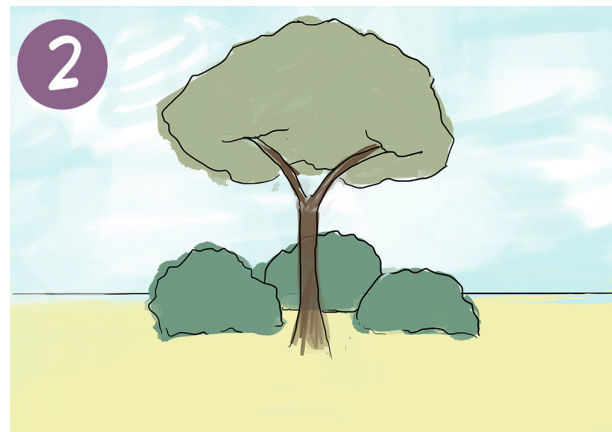
Here is the step by step process for creating a layered garden bed. You can reference this as you read through the different layers of the planting pyramid. The design principles, tips and tricks throughout this guide will help you to make the right plant selections when executing the process.



Landscape Layering: Step-By-Step



Plant a medium-height or small deciduous or evergreen (conifer) tree in your garden bed. You can also use a different focal point as an alternative (or in addition to) planting a tree.



Situate groups of evergreen shrubs around the tree. Never cover the view of the tree's trunk with an evergreen; place them behind or to the side of the trunk.

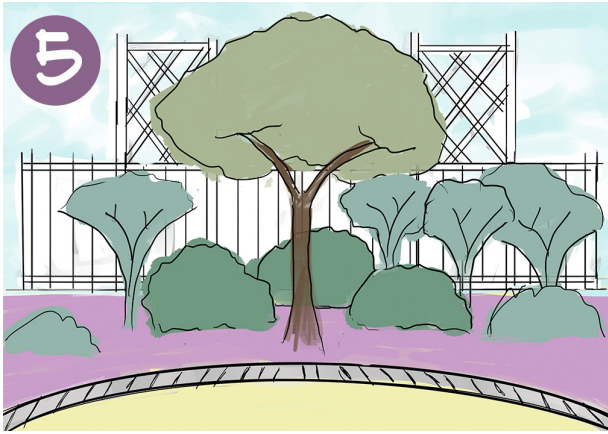


Situate groups of deciduous shrubs around the tree and evergreen shrubs.

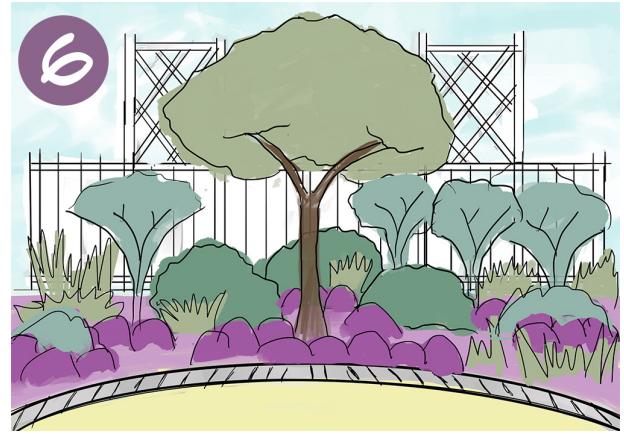


Site walls, fences and background hedges or screen plantings for structure.

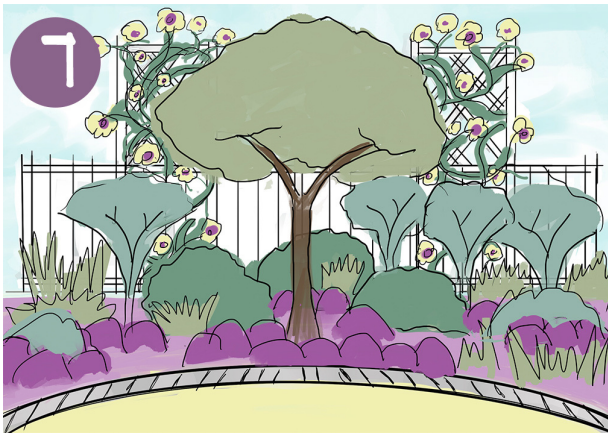
Landscape Layering: Step-By-Step



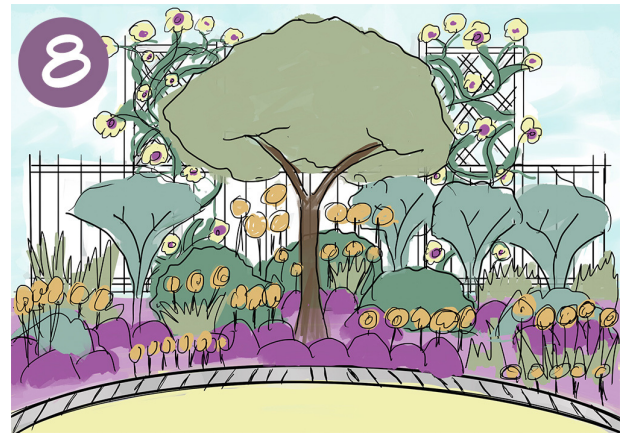
5 Add groundcovers to fill in the border beneath the trees and shrubs.



6 Plant groups of perennial plants, grasses and bulbs within the groundcovers and in front of/between shrub groups.

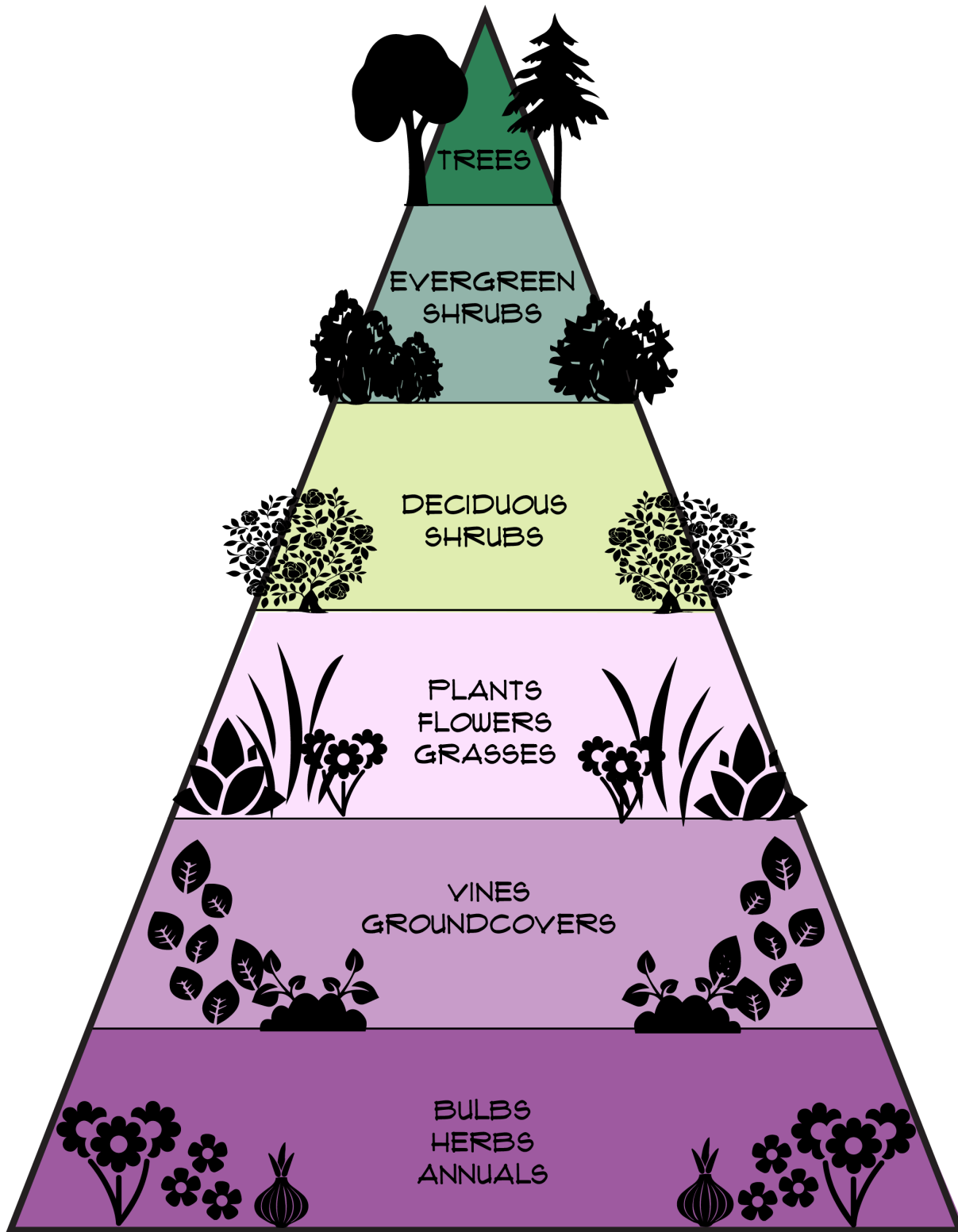


7 Add vines to drape over fences, grow up into your trees or ramble through your shrubs or along the ground.

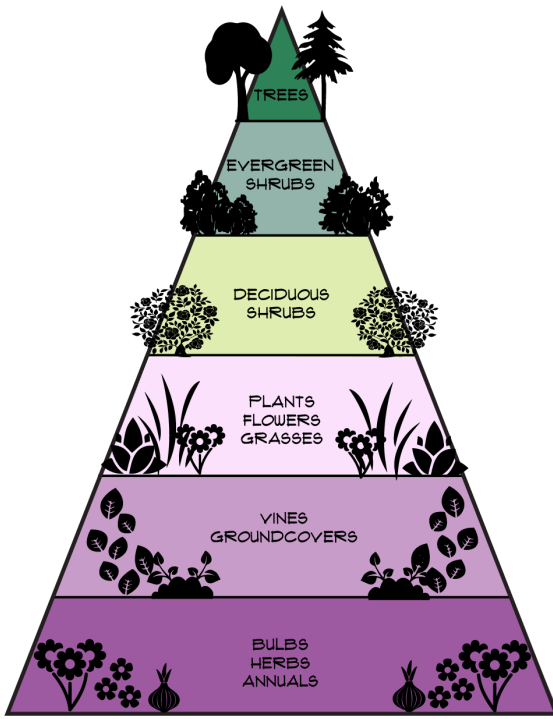


8 Eliminate dead spots and disguise bulb foliage by filling any openings with annuals. Annuals are also very useful to fill in your border while you wait for other plants to grow to their full size.

Layers of the Planting Pyramid

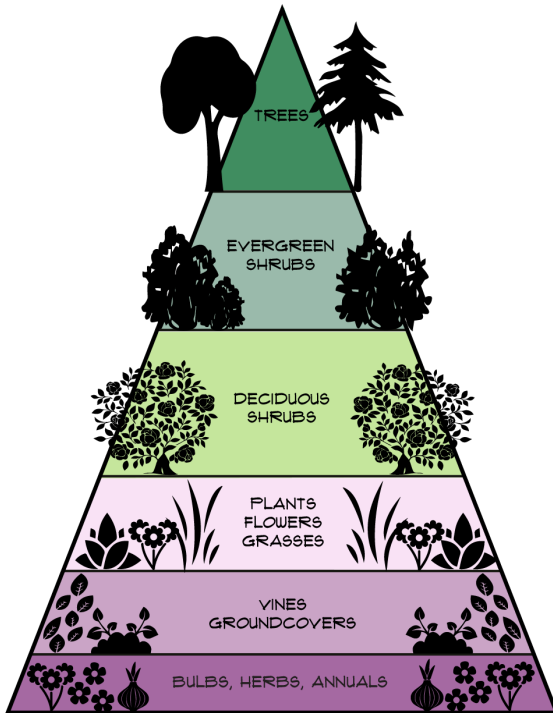
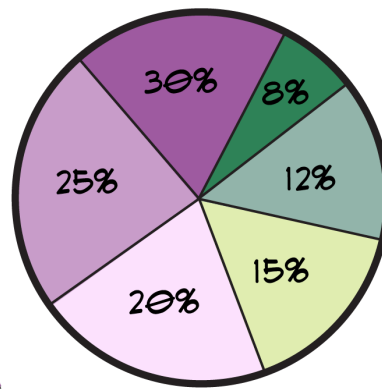


Reducing Maintenance



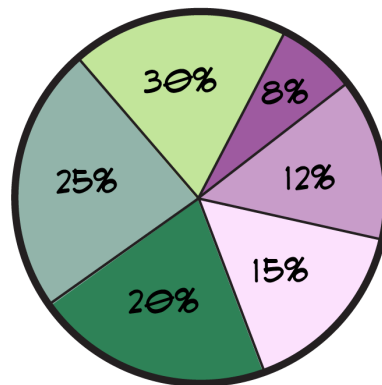
AVERAGE MAINTENANCE


Use these plant ratios for a mixed border with average maintenance needs.



LOWER MAINTENANCE

For a lower maintenance mixed border, use more trees and shrubs in your design.





The Planting Pyramid will give you the basic foundation for creating an amazing landscape. Using the principles of this pyramid, you'll be able to create mixed borders in our favorite garden style. And, because the borders will be mixed with many different types of plants, pieces of your landscape will be showing off all year round!

As you work down the pyramid you should include more and more of each type of planting. Because the lowest-level plants are the smallest in size you can have more of them and use a greater selection!

Oftentimes, I walk by houses and notice that although there's a variety of plants, the landscape still feels like it's lacking *something*. The reason this happens is because that landscape is missing one or more of the layers of the planting pyramid. **Incorporating all of the layers** will bring interest and color to your landscape for all four seasons!

It's important to note that this planting pyramid is just a guide and you don't have to follow it strictly. Overall, you should have a lot more plants, flowers and grasses than you do shrubs. What's more important than the exact quantities of each plant is to make sure that you're **choosing each plant with intention**. Because a mixed border relies on mixing so many different plants, it's easy for the shapes and forms of your plants to be lost and for colors to blur.

Beyond just choosing a wide variety of plants, later I'll show you how to combine these plants in a way that will make your plants pop while still feeling unified.

For now, focus on choosing plants that have multiple seasons of interest, have interesting textures and/or contrasting forms and fit into your color scheme and garden style. Here are a few questions you can ask yourself:

- What is the plant's overall form and how does it combine with other plants around it?
- When full grown, will this plant crowd nearby plants?
- Does the plant add seasonal interest beyond just pretty flowers? Does it have evergreen leaves, change color in fall, have interesting branching or edible berries that attract wildlife?
- When does the plant bloom? For how long does it bloom?
- How will the colors look when mixed with the colors of nearby plants and hardscaping?

Now that you have some questions to think about, let's start at the very top of the pyramid with trees!

Layer 1: Ornamental Trees

As far as I'm concerned, every yard, no matter how big or small, needs at least one tree.

Ornamental trees will ground your landscape. If you already have trees in your yard, then great! You can use what you already have and build your other layers around your trees. Or, add some more if you have the space. Trees are so important in the landscape because they are the most permanent plants. They also dictate what conditions your other plants will enjoy or endure.

The 7 S's of silviculture (the growing and cultivation of trees) are shelter, seclusion, skyline, shade, scale, structure and sculpture.

- **Shelter:** Strategically placed trees can block winds and provide screening.
- **Seclusion:** Trees can provide a sense of privacy, enclosure and security.
- **Skyline:** Trees limit the amount of sky that you see and can form a link between your landscape and the sky above.
- **Shade:** The most common use of trees is to filter light and provide retreat from heat. Tree canopies provide different types of shade, from heavy to dappled.
- **Scale:** Contrast in the size and location of trees can create an interesting perspective and make a garden feel infinitely bigger (or smaller).
- **Structure:** Branches and canopies of trees provide structure and can guide the eye. A tree's structure can change with the seasons.
- **Sculpture:** The right tree will provide a beautiful focal point, a piece of art and something to admire in the landscape.

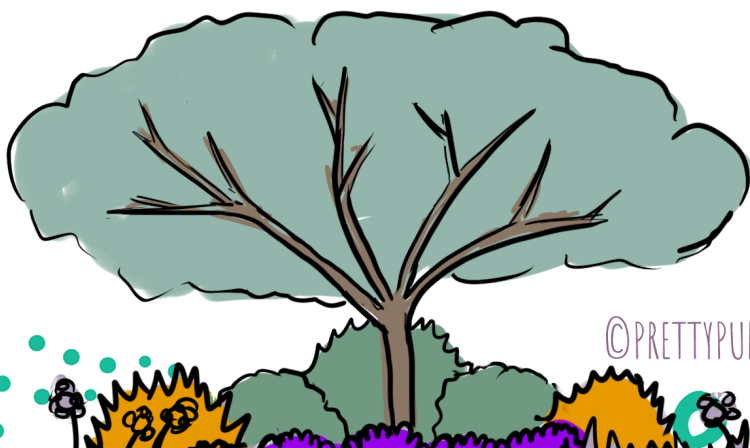


Kousa dogwood (Cornus kousa) non-native, ornamental tree. Frederick County Forestry Board (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.

Tips for Choosing Ornamental Trees

ONCE YOU'VE CHOSEN YOUR PLANTS, REVISIT THIS CHECKLIST TO ENSURE YOU AREN'T MISSING ANYTHING.

- Will you plant close to your house, plumbing or drain pipes? Be sure to research the root system and ensure it's non-invasive.
- How big does it get and how quickly does it grow? Sure it looks cute now, but how big will it get in 30 years? Do you have the appropriate space for its full size?
- Is it hardy in your zone? Can you provide the correct amount of light, moisture, soil type and maintenance for it to thrive?
- Is it prone to disease or fairly disease resistant? Plants native to your geographic area will be the healthiest. Fast-growing trees usually have the shortest lifespan.
- How will it look in the context of nearby plants? Does it fit in or stand out? Think about size, shape, form, color and texture.
- Does it bloom? What time of year/season does it bloom? What color? For how long?
- Will it provide multiple seasons of interest? Flower blooms, berries, attractive foliage, fall color, interesting bark or branching, benefits to wildlife? How long does each last?



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Small Ornamental Trees for Mixed Borders

- 'Autumn Brilliance' Serviceberry (*Amelanchier x grandiflora* 'Autumn Brilliance'), 20-25' H x 15-20' W, Full-Part Sun, Zones 3-8, Native.
- Common Witch Hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*), 15-30'H x 15-25' W, Zones 3-8, Native. Fragrant, yellow flowers bloom from October through December. The foliage, attractive in all growing seasons, also turns yellow to yellowish-orange in fall.
- 'Bloodgood' Japanese Maple, 20-25' H x 20-25' W, Full-Part Sun, Zones 5-9.
- 'Snowdrift' Crabapple, 15-20' H x 15-20' W, Full Sun, Zones 4-8.
- Kousa Dogwood (*Cornus kousa*), 15-25' H x 25' W, Part Sun, Zones 5-8.
- 'Stellar Pink' Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida* x *Cornus kousa*), 20'H x 20'W, Full Sun-Shade, Zones 5-9.
- Japanese Lilac (*Syringa reticulata*), 25-30' H x 20' W, Part Sun, Zones 3-7.
- 'Weeping Higan' Flowering Cherry (*Prunus subhirtella* 'Pendula'), 15-20' H x 15-20' W, Zones 5-8, Full Sun.

Layer 2: Evergreen Shrubs

Evergreen shrubs provide the foundation of a four-season garden.



Landscape design, evergreen shrubs and path. Via Deposit Photos.

In landscaping, the “foundation” of the perennial garden plan is evergreen shrubs. Evergreen shrubs help to create consistency throughout your landscape so that it doesn’t look haphazard. I once read this helpful advice from garden designer Susan A. Roth: First put in the evergreens. Then, the rest will fall into place.

The best thing about evergreen shrubs is that they keep their leaves all year round... even in the dead of winter. If you live in a colder climate like I do, evergreen shrubs are so important for providing color, structure and interest when all deciduous trees and shrubs are bare.

Even though evergreen shrubs may not feel like the most exciting or colorful, they do come in many variations of color, leaf shape and texture which can add so much seasonal interest.



Beautiful Backdrop, Essential Backbone

It's true that evergreen shrubs often take a backseat to deciduous shrubs because most don't flower and change color throughout the year. But even though they change only modestly through the seasons, evergreen shrubs create an important backdrop for your other shrubs, plants and flowers. They also create vital green islands in winter gardens that are otherwise barren.

As a beginner, evergreens seemed boring and I wasn't drawn to them (for obvious reasons). But, you can't underestimate their importance. When all of your blooming bushes and flowers die off or go dormant for the winter, evergreen shrubs are the workhorses that will keep your landscape looking put-together. They also bring much needed life to the garden in desolate winter months. The longer your garden, the more you will come to appreciate the beauty of evergreens and conifers.

One way to use evergreens to create structure is to combine them with other plants in your mixed border. Evergreen shrubs unite the trees in your yard into a harmonious landscape. Because they often have multiple trunks and leafy branches that go all the way to the ground, they fill up the background and frame the borders. They add volume and bulk to the planting. Even the smallest shrubs can act as edging and separate your garden bed from the lawn.

All in all, evergreens are essential workhorses in your garden. They are the backbone that will keep your landscape looking put together. Another benefit to evergreen shrubs is that they are low maintenance once established. I've seen landscapes that are filled with 50-60% evergreen shrubs that are absolutely gorgeous. So if you're looking for a way to create a beautiful mixed border with less maintenance, you can always use more evergreens.

Backdrops Don't Have To Be Boring



Landscape design with open lawn and evergreen shrubs. Via Deposit Photos.

Just because evergreen shrubs are workhorses doesn't mean they have to be boring. There are many textures and options to choose from. Evergreen shrubs can have very small leaves, pointy pine needles or even appear soft and fluffy. Planting opposing textures next to each other accentuates the differences and makes for a more interesting landscape.

The same goes for shape and size. You can pair tall, interestingly shaped evergreens with well-behaved, mounded ones. The effect is dramatic and eye-catching. Taking advantage of their shapes also allows more plants to be packed into an area. For example, you can tuck a low-mounding evergreen near the trunk of a vase-shaped one, allowing one shrub to live underneath the canopy of another.

Evergreens Create "Living" Structure



Traditional garden path, lots of green foliage and topiary. Dave Catchpole (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.

Evergreen shrubs are great for creating structure.

Garden hedges are an ornamental way to divide space, provide protection and even create privacy in your garden.

Garden rooms are a popular concept... and no room is complete without a floor, walls, a ceiling and furniture to make the space functional. A hedge row often makes an excellent divider and wall for your garden room. Traditional hedges are neatly clipped and repeat the same plant over and over again. But, an informal evergreen hedge of mixed shrubs can also create a casual, mixed border that forms a wall in your garden room.

There are so many ways to use evergreens in your landscape. The key to choosing evergreens is to ensure that your conditions are right (sun, moisture, wildlife, size). Once you narrow down your choices, look for interesting foliage that will contrast or compliment the rest of your plantings.

Tips for Choosing Evergreen Shrubs

HERE ARE THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING EVERGREENS TO CREATE A FLOWING STRUCTURE THAT WILL HOLD UP THROUGHOUT EVERY SEASON:

- Will you plant close to your house, plumbing or drain pipes? Be sure to research the root system and ensure it's non-invasive.
- How big does it get and how quickly does it grow? Do you have the appropriate space for its full size?
- Is it hardy in your zone? Can you provide the correct amount of light, moisture, soil type and maintenance for it to thrive?
- Is it prone to disease or fairly disease resistant? Plants native to your geographic area will be the healthiest.
- How will it look in the context of nearby plants? Does it fit in or stand out? Think about size, shape, form and texture.
- Does it bloom? What time of year/season does it bloom? What color? For how long?
- Will it provide multiple seasons of interest? Flower blooms, berries, attractive foliage, fall color, interesting bark or branching, benefits to wildlife? How long does each last?
- How will it contribute to your garden throughout the year, especially in winter?

Using Evergreens in a Mixed Border

- GROUP EVERGREENS TOGETHER.
- CHOOSE ONE PLANT AS THE FOCAL POINT AND ADD OTHERS THAT COMPLIMENT ITS COLOR, TEXTURE AND FORM.
- REPEAT THE SAME GROUPING OR PLAN A COMPLIMENTARY GROUPING FARTHER DOWN THE BORDER.
- BETWEEN THE EVERGREEN GROUPS, PLANT DECIDUOUS SHRUBS AND PERENNIALS. SHOWCASE ONE OR TWO WITH OUTSTANDING WINTER INTEREST.
- STAGGER EVERGREEN SHRUBS SO THEY DON'T LINE UP IN NEAT ROWS.

Evergreen Shrubs For Mixed Borders

- Boxwood 'Northern Charm' (Buxus 'Wilson'), 4' H x 4' W, Zones 4-8.
- Juniper 'Blue Star' (Juniperus squamata), 2' H x 3' W, Zones 4-8.
- Yew 'Tauntonii' (Taxus x media), 3-4' H x 5-6' W, Zones 4-7.
- False Cypress 'Golden Mop' (Chamaecyparis pisifera), 3' H x 4' W, Zones 4-8.
- Abelia 'Radiance' (Abelia x grandiflora 'Radiance' PP21929) 2-3' H x 4-5' W, Zones 6-10.
- Dwarf Loropetalum 'Purple Daydream' (Loropetalum chinense), 2-3' H x 3-4' W, Zones 6-10.
- Indian Hawthorn 'Pinkie' (Raphiolepis indica), 2-3'H x 3-4'W, Zones 7-9.
- Rhododendron 'PJM' (Rhododendron x 'PJM' H-1), 3-4'H x 4-5'W, Zones 4-8.

Layer 3: Deciduous Shrubs

Looking for that amazing “pop” of color in your garden or landscape? Want something that makes a statement and really stands out against your backdrop! Enter... deciduous perennial shrubs.



Colorful mixed border, Ramster Gardens, Surrey. Mark Wordy (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.




Magenta & amber color scheme, Ramster Gardens, Surrey. Mark Wordy (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.



Flowering Rhododendron reflecting in water. Mark Wordy (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.

Use deciduous perennial shrubs to add balance and even more structure to your landscape.



These flowering shrubs can really catch the attention of passersby. If you're following along, you have already chosen your trees and evergreen shrubs. Deciduous shrubs are the perfect foreground for your trees and evergreen shrubs because they add tons of color and interest and are large enough to add structure and make a statement. Planting blooming deciduous shrubs in front of a background of evergreens will really make the blooms POP and sparkle. And, when your deciduous shrubs are done blooming, your sturdy evergreen foundation will keep your garden from looking bare and messy.


See, your landscape is already starting to take shape.

When choosing deciduous shrubs in the standard home landscape, space is usually an issue. Some shrubs can get very large, so it's important to make sure that your shrub "earns" its place in the garden. That means providing color and interest in multiple seasons. If you are extremely limited in space, there are also many dwarf shrubs available that can provide color and interest in a more petite form.

So what constitutes interest beyond just the flower blooms? Unique foliage, peeling or interesting bark and texture, fruits/berries, fall foliage. The form or habit of a shrub can also have lots of appeal. Shrubs can be mounded, vase-shaped, spiraling, spreading, upright, arching, weeping and more. All of these forms are very beautiful in the garden.

The trick to choosing shrubs for your garden is unifying them in some way. You may be excited to hear about all the different forms you can choose for your mixed border, which can tempt you into choosing one of each. But, without any repetition or theme to tie your shrubs together, it will not look unified. The common ways to unify your shrub selections are through bloom color and habit. Using pink blooms as a unifier, you can find shrubs with similar forms that will bloom pink in spring, summer and fall. For example:

- Dwarf Pink Flowering Almond (*Prunus glandulosa* 'Rosea Plea'), Full Sun-Part Sun, Zones 4-8, 4-5'H x 3-4'W, blooms with pollinator-magnet rosebud-shaped pink blossoms on bare branches in early spring. The tiny leaves add a soft texture to your landscape and small, dark red fruits are devoured by songbirds in the fall.
- Suzanne Weigela (*Weigela florida* 'Suzanne'), Full Sun, Zones 4-8, 4'H x 1-4'W, blooms with pink and white trumpet-like blooms in late spring through early summer. The foliage is also variegated (two-toned) for interest even when not in bloom.
- White Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos x doorenbosii* 'White Hedge'), Full Sun-Shade, Zones 4-7, 4-5'H x 3-5'W, hummingbirds love the dainty pink blooms accented by blue-green foliage from summer through fall. Highly adaptable to sun levels and moisture, white snowberry also produces large, white berries in fall.

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- Little Quick Fire® Hydrangea (*Hydrangea paniculata*), Full Sun-Part Sun, Zones 3-8, 3-5'H x 3-5'H, blooms with white 8" long panicles in summer that fade to heirloom pink in fall on vibrant green foliage. Leave the dried blooms on for winter interest!

You can also choose a unique specimen shrub to form a focal point amidst other shrubs that look similar to each other. In this example, perhaps a Black Tower Elderberry (*Sambucus nigra* 'Eiffel 1') would fit the bill. At 6-8'H x 3-4'W, this shrub has a columnar habit with breathtaking rich burgundy foliage. Large pink flowers in summer are followed by shiny black berries in the fall making it a multi-season winner.


Tips for Choosing Deciduous Shrubs

HERE ARE SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING
ORNAMENTAL SHRUBS:

- Will you plant close to your house, plumbing or drain pipes? Be sure to research the root system and ensure it's non-invasive.
- How big does it get and how quickly does it grow? Do you have the appropriate space for its full size?
- Is it hardy in your zone? Can you provide the correct amount of light, moisture, soil type and maintenance for it to thrive?
- Is it prone to disease or fairly disease resistant? Plants native to your geographic area will be the healthiest.
- How will it look in the context of nearby plants? Does it fit in or stand out? Think about size, shape, form, color and texture.
- Does it bloom? What time of year/season does it bloom? What color? For how long?
- Will it provide multiple seasons of interest? Flower blooms, berries, attractive foliage, fall color, interesting bark or branching, benefits to wildlife? How long does each last?

Deciduous Shrubs with Multi-Season Interest

- P.J.M. Rhododendron (Rhododendron 'P.J.M.'), 4-6'H x 3-4'W, Zones 4-8, massive mauve blooms in early spring, evergreen foliage turns stunning purple & russet colors near the end of fall.
- Azalea 'Hot Shot Girard' (Azalea x 'Girard's Hot Shot'), 2-3'H x 2-3'W, Zones 6-9, blooms in mid-spring, orange-red fall foliage, evergreen in mild climates.
- Elderberry 'Black Beauty' (Sambucus nigra 'Gerda') or 'Black Lace' (Sambucus nigra 'Eva'), 8-12'H x 5-6'W, Zones 4-7, great for cooler climates, blooms with pink flowers in late spring to summer, purple-black foliage resembles a Japanese Maple, berries in the fall.
- American Black Elderberry (Sambucus canadensis), Native, 8-12'H x 8-12'W, Zones 4-9, lemon-scented blooms late spring through early summer, a single, mature shrub can yield 12-15 pounds of deep purple berries each fall.
- Indian Hawthorne 'Pinkie' (Raphiolepis indica 'Pinkie'), 2-5'H x 3-4'W, Zones 7-9, does great in part shade, blooms with small pink flowers in spring, dwarf habit and dark evergreen foliage.
- Sunny Knock Out® Shrub Rose (Rosa SUNNY KNOCK OUT 'RADsunny'), 3-4'H x 3-4'W, Zones 5-11, reblooms from spring through fall.
- Sonic Bloom® Pink Reblooming Weigela (Weigela florida SONIC BLOOM 'Bokrasopin'), 4-5'Hx4-5'W, Zones 5-8, blooms from late spring through fall.
- Hydrangea 'Little Quickfire' (Hydrangea paniculata), 3-5'H x 3-5'W, Zones 3-8, blooms in early summer through fall, panicles provide winter interest.
- Virginia Rose (Rosa virginiana), Native, 2-4'H x 2-4'W, Zones 3-8, blooms early to late summer, maroon to orange fall foliage color with red fruit that persists through winter on glossy red canes.
- Spirea 'Superstar' (Spiraea x bumalda 'Denistar'), 2-3'H x 1-4'W, Zones, 3-8, blooms in summer. Note: Spiraea japonica is invasive in certain areas of the US. Please do your research before planting.
- Smoke Bush 'Velveteeny' (Cotinus coggygria), 3-4'H x 3-4'W, Zones 4-8, blooms in summer.
- 'Beyond Midnight' Bluebeard (Caryopteris x clandonensis), 2-3'H x 2-3'W, Zones 5-9, blooms in late summer.
- Hydrangea 'Invincibelle Limetta' (Hydrangea arborescens 'NCHA8'), Native, 3-4'H x 3-4'W, blooms early summer through fall.
- Rose of Sharon 'Blue Chiffon' (Hibiscus syriacus), 8-12'H x 5-6'W, Zones 5-9, blooms mid-summer to fall.

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- Brandywine™ Viburnum (*Viburnum nudum* 'Bulk'), 5-6'H x 5-6'W, Zones 5-9, tiny white blooms in spring, bright blue & vivid pink berries in fall, maroon foliage in fall.
 - Golden-Twig Dogwood (*Cornus sericea* 'Flaviramea'), 7-9'H x 10-12'W, Zones 3-8, white flowers late spring, white berries late summer, purple-red foliage in fall, golden yellow branches and stems in winter.

Layer 4: Perennial Plants, Flowers & Grasses



Pink, purple and blue mixed border, Mottisfont Abbey & Gardens, Hampshire. Mark Wordy (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.

Now that the “workhorses” are in place, it’s time to add some fun color and style to our landscape. That’s where perennial plants and flowers really come into play. Since perennial plants and flowers are smaller in size, you can really add a lot of these to your landscape plan.



Red flowering mixed border, Hidcote Manor Gardens. Mark Wordy (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.

Perennial plants and flowers may just be my favorite layer we're going to talk about -- I doubt I am alone in that. There are so many options to choose from!

From late spring through summer and into early fall, perennials take the spotlight in a mixed border. The bones of your garden may almost disappear behind the wealth of perennial plants and flowers.

Choose perennial plants for their seasonal flowers and colors but also consider each plant's form, texture and color. Why? Because the flowers of your perennial plants are fleeting compared to their foliage, which is usually on display for months before it dies back in the fall.

Tips for Choosing Perennials

HERE ARE SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING VINES AND GROUNDCOVERS:

- Should you plant just one or a grouping of 3, 5, 7 (or more)?
- Is it hardy in your zone?
- Can you provide the correct amount of light, moisture, soil type and maintenance for it to thrive?
- Is it prone to disease or fairly disease resistant? Plants native to your geographic area will be the healthiest.
- How will it look in the context of nearby plants? Does it fit in or stand out? Think about size, shape, form, color and texture.
- Does it bloom? What time of year/season does it bloom? What color? For how long?
- Will it provide multiple seasons of interest? Flower blooms, berries, attractive foliage, fall color, interesting bark or branching, benefits to wildlife? How long does each last?
- Does it look good all year or die back in the winter? How will you fill the gap?

Perennial Plants & Flowers For Mixed Borders

- Daylilies (Hemerocallis), 2-3'H x 2-3'W, Zones 3-8, long blooming through summer, very easy to care for and divide.
- Eastern purple coneflower (Echinacea purpurea), 4'H x 3'W, Zones 3-8, Native, bloom all summer and attract songbirds in fall who enjoy eating seed filled cones.
- Coral Bells (Heuchera), 1-1.5'H x 1.5-2'W, Zones 3-8, Native, tolerate some shade, variety of colors from deep plum purples and reds to orange to chartreuse green, small delicate blooms soar 12-24" above the leaves from June through August. Foliage can be evergreen in warmer climates.
- Lanceleaf Tickseed 'Early Sunrise' (Coreopsis lanceolate), 18-24"H x 12-18"W, Zones 3-9, Native, sunny yellow-orange blooms from late spring through fall, thrives in heat and sun.

Ornamental Grasses For Mixed Borders

- Fescue 'Elijah Blue' (Festuca glauca), 1'H x 1'W, Zones 4-11, fine silver-blue foliage makes these small clumps appear to sparkle, semi-evergreen and drought-tolerant.
- Feather Reed Grass 'Karl Foerster' (Calamagrostis x acutiflora), 3-5'H x 2-3'W (clumps), Zones 4-9, a graceful, tall, slender vertical grass with wheat colored seed heads that form in mid summer and continue through fall.
- Striped Tuber Oat Grass (Arrhenatherum elatius subsp. bulbosum 'Variegatum'), 2'H x 1' W (clumps), Zones 4-9, soft textured leaves appear spikey, variegated white and dark green foliage performs well in dry shade.
- Pink Muhly Grass (Muhlenbergia capillaris), 3-4'H x 3-4'W, Zones 6-9, unique, fluffy pink sprays of color last for months.
- Little Bluestem 'Standing Ovation' (Schizachyrium scoparium, Native, 4'H (in bloom) x 2-3'W, Zones 3-8, foliage starts blue with hints of greens, purples and pinks changing to reds and oranges in the fall.
- Japanese Forest Grass 'All Gold' (Hakonechloa macra), 1.5'H x 1.5'W, Zones 4-9, graceful, chartreuse mounding grass great for shady areas.

Layer 5: Vines & Groundcovers



This Red Berry Arch combines the beauty of climbing vines with the texture of evergreen conifers, perennials and groundcovers. John K Thorne (CC0 1.0) via Flickr

Vines are often an overlooked element in many gardens, but they can provide a finishing touch by linking the garden's layers together. While most of us think of vines climbing lamp posts and fences, another effective way to use them is by weaving them into your garden beds! Yes— you can train them to grow over your shrubs and into your trees.!

By doing this, you can extend the blooming season of both the vine and the tree/shrub you train them on. Plant summer blooming vines among your spring blooming shrubs. Or try planting two vines with different bloom seasons on the same fence!

Groundcovers are the low-growing or low-spreading plants that spread in masses a foot or so tall. Just like vines, groundcovers can help to unify your garden design. As an added bonus, many groundcovers can adorn your garden with pretty foliage, flowers and even berries.

Groundcovers also have benefits to your garden. Groundcovers can even be low-growing perennials or mounding grasses planted in mass. If it can help to smother weeds and keep the soil around your other plants shady and cool, it can be a groundcover.



Left: The long border with yellow, orange and red, Longstock Park, UK. Herry Lawford (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr. Right: Pale pink clematis climbs along a brick wall. Oliver Ash (CC0 1.0) via Unsplash.

Tips for Choosing Vines & Groundcovers

HERE ARE SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING PERENNIAL PLANTS, FLOWERS AND GRASSES:

- Choose wisely. Many vines and groundcovers are aggressive and can choke out other plants. These varieties require regular corrective weeding to keep them in check.
- I often use annual vines in my landscape so I can change up the look every year. There are also many annual groundcovers to try.
- Is it hardy in your zone? Can you provide the correct amount of light, moisture, soil type and maintenance for it to thrive?
- Is it prone to disease or fairly disease resistant? Plants native to your geographic area will be the healthiest.
- How will it look in the context of nearby plants? Does it fit in or stand out? Think about size, shape, form, color and texture.
- Is the groundcover thick enough to suppress weeds? Will bulbs and other perennials be able to break through the cover or will you need to prune it back?
- Does it bloom? What time of year/season does it bloom? What color? For how long? Some groundcovers only bloom for a short period of time.
- Will it provide multiple seasons of interest? Flower blooms, berries, attractive foliage, fall color, interesting bark or branching, benefits to wildlife? How long does each last?
- Does it look good all year or die back in the winter? How will you fill the gap?

Vines for Mixed Borders

- Rocktrumpet Vine (Mandevilla) 'Pretty Pink', 10-20' H x 2-3' W, Zones 9-11, grown as annual in colder climates, mandevilla blooms abundantly for months with trumpet-shaped flowers in shades of red, pink or white.
- Black-eyed Susan Vine 'Sunny Susy Rose Sensation' (Thunbergia alata), 3-6'H x 1.5'W, Zones 8-10, only recommend growing as an annual in zones 7 and under, large velvety blossoms in shades of rich rose pink bloom endlessly from late spring through frost.
- Maypop Passion Flower (Passiflora incarnata), get beautiful 3" pink, lavender or purple flowers in summer with fragrance and succulent fruit from native North American Passion Flower. The hardiest of the Passion Flowers growing as far north as New England.
- Clematis 'General Sikorski', 8-10'H x 3-4'W, Zones 4-8, dark lavender (almost blue) flowers are semi-double blooms during its spring bloom and single during the fall bloom period.
- Clematis 'Jackmanii Superba', 10-12'H x 3-4'W, Zones 4-8, 5" flowers fade from deep to light purple, it blooms profusely mid-summer through fall.
- Clematis 'Blue Explosion', 7-9'H x 1-3'W, Zones 4-10, 5" semi-double periwinkle purple-blue flowers trimmed with pink tips blooming in late spring and again in late summer-early fall.
- Clematis 'Mrs. N. Thompson', 6-8' H x 3-4' W, Zones 3-7, bi-color deep purple and magenta spiky blossoms resembling a passion flower and blooming in late spring and again in the fall.
- Clematis 'Kardynal Wyszyneski', 8-10'H x 3-4'W, Zones 4-8, 6-8" crimson pink blooms in summer with a second bloom in the fall.
- Clematis 'Beautiful Bride', 6-9'H x 1-3'W, Zones 4-9, XL 10" white blooms all the way to the base in summer.

Groundcovers for Mixed Borders

- Creeping Phlox (Phlox subulata), 6"H x 12-24"W, Zones 3-9, Native, a carpet of color in mid-late spring in white, blue-purple, multiple shades of pink, looks like moss when not in bloom and requires little care.
- Sedum Angelina (Sedum rupestre), 3-6" H x 18-24" W, Zones 3-11, spiky yellow chutes with ginger brown tips slowly create a carpet in your beds, drought-tolerant and not aggressive.
- Bugleweed 'Black Scallop' Ajuga, 4-6"H x 3'W, Zones 4-9, a great option for shade with very dark burgundy leaves and tiny deep lavender flowers that shoot up above the foliage carpet in late spring, can spread vigorously.

- Sweet Woodruff (*Galium odoratum*), 8-10" H x 12-18" W, Zones 5-9, semi-evergreen groundcover forming a thick mat with dainty white flowers in mid-late spring, great for woodland areas, can spread vigorously.
- Mounding grasses: many mounding grasses also make an excellent groundcover option, such as forest grass and sedges.



Design Principles For Layered Landscapes

Structure: The Bones of Your Garden

As we learned earlier, one of the most common gardening mistakes is a lack of structure, or bones. That's because without good bones to support it, a garden can't hold its own. This is especially true in cold frosts and heat waves when your plantings are not at their best.

Professional landscapers always plan the structure first.

So what are the bones exactly? The bones are NOT flowers and foliage as most think. The bones of your landscape are trees, shrubs, fences, walls, hard surfaces and outlines. The bones provide a backdrop for displaying your beloved flowers and foliage. Garden bones also help to frame our views of the garden.

Since creating structure is the biggest mistake and the most important first step, let's learn how to do it. Maybe an example will help:


Below is a beautiful front yard landscape. Can you see the structure? I drew some of the bones in black so you can see them clearly.

- The large tree on the right -- it frames the whole yard by draping to the left and over the entire front lawn.
- The smaller trees to the left of the stairs frame the landscape from the other side.
- The fence in the front of the yard and the stone wall along the left provide structure.
- The corner of the home to the left of the garage creates another framed area accented by narrow trees.
- The large rock to the left and the smaller tree to the right of the walkway toward the stairs create additional structure.

Do you see what all of these things have in common? I didn't mention anything about the color of the flower or the leaf patterns of the trees and shrubs. It's all about the lines that guide your eye... that's structure.

Lack of Structure & What To Do About It

Now that we have an idea of our dream garden style and know the basics of structure, it's time to start putting it all together. So, I'm going to let you in on a little secret...



The reason most landscapes fail to impress is because they lack an attractive structure.

All too often I see:

- a stiff hedge, pruned into a neat row lining the foundation like soldiers.
- A couple trees or shrubs dotting the lawn in isolation.
- Beds of annuals that died with the frost, eventually leaving a big empty patch in the yard.

Sound familiar?

The way to avoid these common mistakes is to start with the bones, or the structure of your landscape. Without a good structure to support it, a garden can't hold its own throughout the year. This holds especially true when you'll be layering your plants within the landscape.

If you are new to gardening, hopefully we can avoid some of these common mistakes. But, you may be thinking... What if you've already made this mistake?

It's ok, trust me. You are not doomed. Mistakes can be repaired. Gardening is a wonderful hobby and my honest full-hearted belief is that anything can be fixed, changed, moved and re-imagined.

Structure Homework

The first step to repairing poor structure in your garden is being able to identify it. And, that's exactly what this exercise will do.

With a camera in hand, step outside of your own home. Take a few photos of your landscape from different angles. I like to print out the photos onto regular bond paper or use a computer app/program to review them.

Can you pick out the bones you may already have in place in your landscape? Circle these spots with a pen or marker.

Can you see where the bones are missing in your own landscape? Circle these spots with a different colored pen or marker.

Now, try to envision the areas where you can add structure to your landscape. Can you create solutions for areas lacking structure by drawing in your structure lines?

Structure Exercise Example

Below is a photo of a beautiful front yard landscape. I drew some of the bones in black so you can see them clearly.



- The large tree on the right frames the yard by draping to the left and over the front lawn.
- The smaller trees to the left of the stairs frame the landscape from the other side.
- The wooden fence and the stone wall along the left also provide structure to the space.
- The corner of the home to the left of the garage is the perfect place for a focal point of columnar trees.
- The large rock to the left and the smaller tree to the right of the walkway near the stairs create additional structure.

Repetition



Blue border at Peckover House & Garden, Wisbech, England. Dave Catchpole (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.

Consistency in your perennial garden plan is really important. Repetition can be created with your plantings using a specific plant, a specific color or a specific design element throughout your garden.



Grass path with pink and purple flower borders. Steve Slater (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.

A specific plant: Using a specific plant throughout the entire landscape can create rhythm, so that your eye will flow across the landscape.



Lambs ears and salvia border a path, Chartwell, Kent. Mark Wordy (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.

A specific color: You can also achieve repetition by choosing multiple objects or plants in the same color family, such as light green, yellow, or even pink! Repeating the same color (even if the textures and sizes vary) will give a similar effect and allow your eye to bounce across the landscape.



A cactus garden with different types of plants in Lanzarote, Canary Islands, Spain. alevision.co (CC0 1.0) via Unsplash.

A specific design element: Repeating a particular design element, like brick paving, wrought iron or any other design element will also create consistency throughout your garden.



Arched borders of greenery at Singapore Botanic Gardens creates repetition using arched structures with climbing vines. _paVan_ (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.

A specific shape: You can repeat circles, squares or any organic shape throughout your garden to create a cohesive look.



The curving, mounded shape is seen in both the rhododendron, arched stone bridge and the flowering shrub in the background. Kathleen Handrich (CC0 1.0) via Pixabay.

When used correctly, repetition helps to create harmony, balance, flow and clarity in a design.



Scale

Scale is very important in landscape layering. It determines how many and what sized plants to use in your landscape. Creating proper scale involves:

- Using the correct size plants so that they will fit into the area when they are full grown. It's important to use large enough (or small enough) plantings for the space you are putting them in.
- Using varying sizes of plants to create visual interest. Using a small wide plant next to a tall narrow tree will accentuate the features of each plant.
- Using enough plants for the size of your house and yard. If you don't use enough plants, your landscape will look scarce and disconnected.

Balance

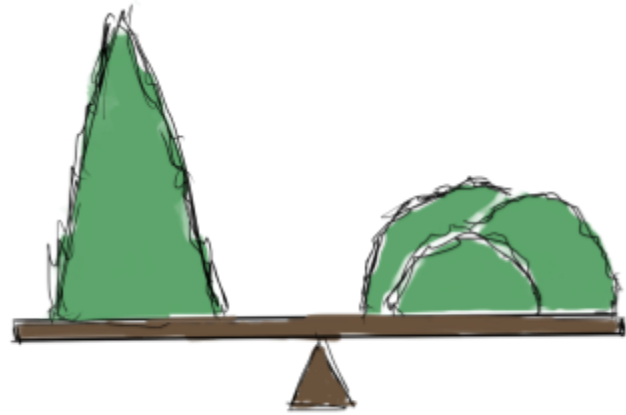
Balance is one of the more subtle elements present in good design. Where most home owners struggle with balance is when symmetry is not possible; i.e. asymmetrical design. A symmetrical design is basically repeating the same plants on either side of the focal point. Asymmetry is when you use different plants on either side of the focal point.

A common struggle for home owners is trying to balance two sides of a foundation planting when the front door is not exactly centered. In this situation, the front door is the focal point. Another common scenario is the front face of a home that has a driveway/garage on one side of the home. Obviously, you can't put a planting bed right in the driveway to create a symmetrical design around the front door. So, how do you actually make the landscape feel balanced?

Balance is directly related to a plant's visual weight. A plant's visual weight is basically how big of a presence the plant has in your garden. Visual weight is made up of mainly three different elements; mass, color and density.

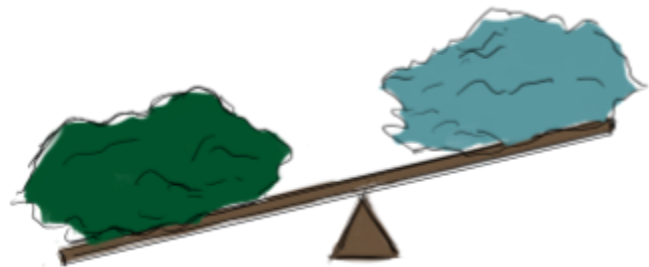


A plant's mass is determined by its overall size; how much space it takes up in your garden; how wide and tall it is. Although different plant amounts, sizes and shapes, the overall weight of this large cone-shaped tree is equal to the mass of the three shrubs.



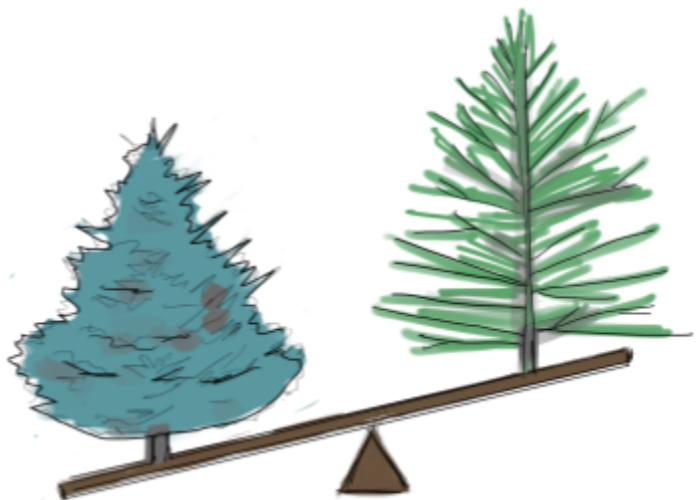
Equal Mass. Illustration by Amy Fedele of Pretty Purple Door.

A plant's color also plays a role in balance. Certain colors carry more weight than others. As a rule of thumb, darker colors feel heavier than lighter colors.



*Dark green is a "heavier" color in the garden than blue.
Illustration by Amy Fedele of Pretty Purple Door.*

The density of a plant can also affect balance in your landscape. Density is how "full" a tree or shrub is. The thicker the foliage and branching, the more density the plant has. So, you can't balance a dense plant with an open and airy one of the same size.



*A plant with dense, full branches has a "heavier" presence in the garden than a plant with an open branching structure.
Illustration by Amy Fedele of Pretty Purple Door.*

Unity & Flow

One of the most common problems I see is the lack of connection from one part of the garden to another.

For example: These are my foundation shrubs. Over here are my roses. This area is where I plant my annuals. This type of landscape is very common but also creates so much maintenance and just looks like a hodgepodge of random “stuff”. Imagine having to mow or trim around all of these little islands? Maybe you don’t have to imagine it because you are already doing it every week?



The majority of home landscapes are spotty-dotty, lacking connection between different spaces. Illustration by Amy Fedele of Pretty Purple Door.

To create flow and unity in your landscape, you need to learn how to guide a person’s eye from one garden area to another.

So, how can you connect some of these areas together? Or make a smoother transition from the foundation plantings over to the roses? What are the best ways to draw someone further into your garden? How can you peak their curiosity and sense of wonder?

The solution is to create a flow to your landscape — not separate zones.

As we learned earlier, repetition is the key to creating unity in your landscape and flow from one area of your garden to another. You can repeat a plant, a color, a texture, a shape or even a material (like wood, stone or glass).



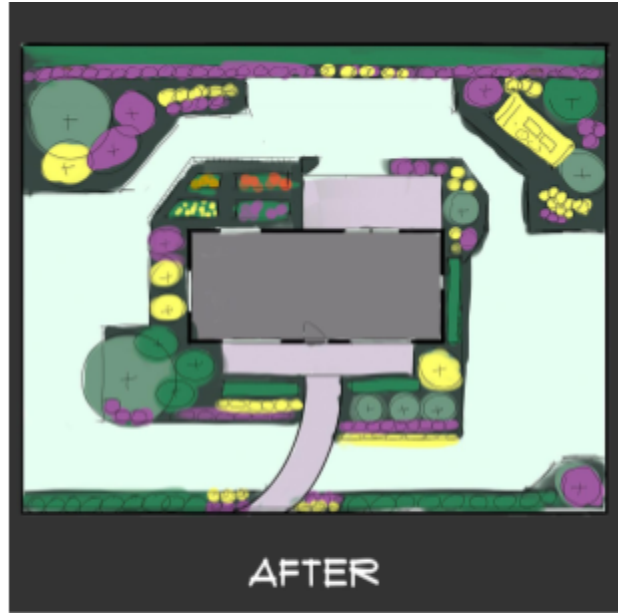
This garden design uses plant repetition to lead your eye down the border (Mottisfont Abbey & Gardens, Hampshire). Mark Wordy (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.

Paths are another great way to create flow and unite a space. A path can mean a “literal” walking path made of grass, brick, stone, mulch, gravel or anything else you can think of. A path can also be a bit more abstract. A mass planting of groundcover that flows from one part of your garden to another can be considered a path. As can a dry river bed or a flowing stream. Anything that creates a connection between the spaces of your garden can be considered a “path,” because it visually moves a viewer’s eye through your landscape.



In this design, a grass lawn is used as a path to lead you towards the building (Bramdean House Open Garden, England). Mark Wordy (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.

Let's go back to our example landscape plan. Instead of creating smaller areas, try to combine some of these areas together or extend the plantings outward from the foundation. If there is a tree near your plantings, why not encompass that tree into the planting area? Nestle your house into the plantings around it. You can see how by building all the pieces of the landscape into different groups, it also created "invisible" paths of movement through the grass. If you wanted to completely remove sections of the lawn, you could even replace the grass with hardscaped paths.



These before and after drawings demonstrate how you can take a disconnected landscape and tie different pieces together. Illustrations by Amy Fedele of Pretty Purple Door.



Layering Tips and Tricks

Use Personal Items To Inspire Colors For Your Outdoor Space

One of my favorite ways to build a color palette is to use home decor and personal items for cues. Raid your wardrobe and examine the colors you like to wear. What patterns and colors do you use for your bedding, curtains, throw pillows, walls? What colors are you attracted to in the artwork displayed throughout your home? You can use all of these pieces in your home to inspire your outdoor space as well. And the great thing about it is that your landscape will be more unique and personal because of it.

Imagine building an entire garden off the colors or pattern of your favorite blouse or hat. Or, using the color palette from your favorite painting? Or, pulling colors or material choices from a souvenir you brought home from your dream vacation? It's a gorgeous and inspiring way to make your landscape uniquely you.

Strive For Multi-Season Interest

Sure, that forsythia really lights up in the landscape in early spring. But, what happens after a week or two when the blooms are gone? In my opinion, the forsythia doesn't do much for the landscape beyond its 10 days of color. So, when choosing plants for your landscape, try to choose plants that will do more than just bloom for a week or two. We've already discussed many ways that plants, shrubs and trees can create interest in multiple seasons. Now it's time to go through your list of potential mixed border plants and decide... is this plant worthy of space in my garden?

And, by all means, if there's a particular plant that you just really love, add it to your landscape. Even if it doesn't provide multi-season interest, it doesn't mean you aren't allowed to plant it. Just try to balance that plant with others that will do double or triple duty for you. I find this to be especially necessary if you have a smaller garden with limited space for planting.

Vary the Shape, Size & Heights of Plants



This pink, purple and blue blooming border combines plants with different sizes, shapes and heights to create interest (Chippenham Park Gardens, Freckenham, England). Karen Roe (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.



A pink and purple color scheme ties this border together, while a mixture of different plant shapes and textures sets it apart (Sissinghurst Castle Garden - Kent, UK). Mark Wordy (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.

Another key part of landscape layering is to vary the size and the heights of the plants you're using.

When choosing plants, it's easy to gravitate towards 1 foot mounded plants, as there are a lot to choose from in this particular range. But, challenge yourself to incorporate taller plants and low growers into your plan. When you choose a wide range of plant sizes, your garden will look more engaging and dynamic.

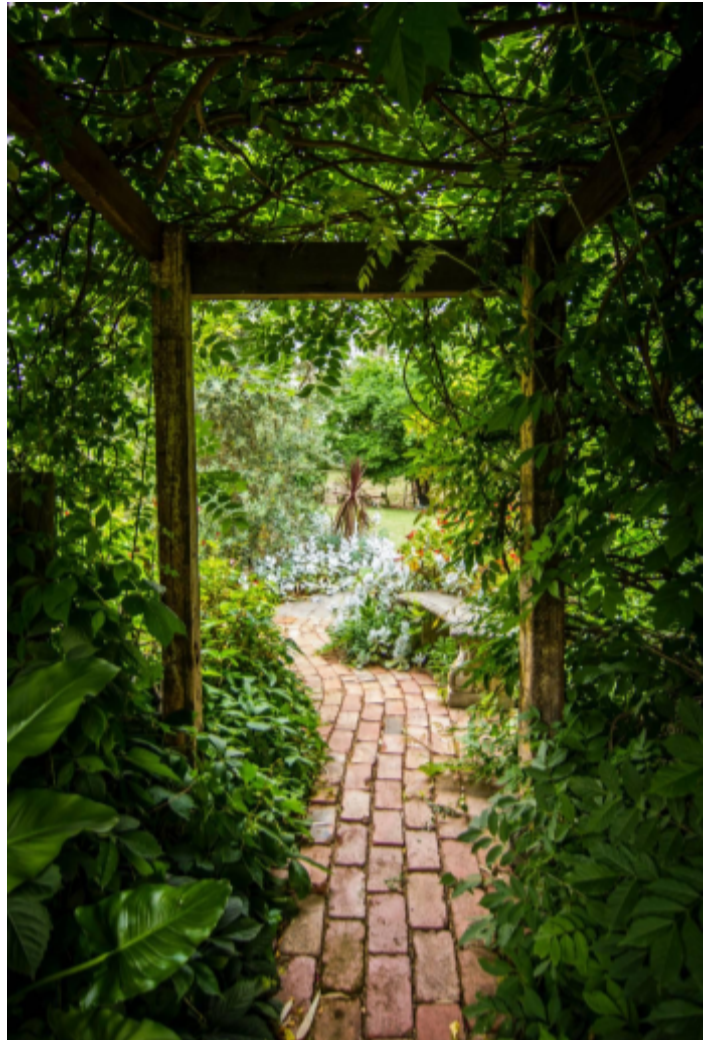
Varying the shapes of the trees, shrubs and plants is another great way to add interest to a mixed border. Include some spiky plants with mounded ones. Choose a pyramidal evergreen and pair it with a rounded one. It's easy to go overboard with all of these choices so I'd recommend choosing a main shape to repeat throughout your garden, then "punctuate" the garden bed with some different, exciting plant forms to mix things up.

Hide Views

Hiding parts of your garden from the viewer is a super ninja garden design trick that you can easily try at home! It can be difficult for non-designers to visualize this (more on this later). Just know that blocking the view to parts of your landscape is simply more interesting.

Hiding pieces of your garden from plain view does a few important things:

- Invokes a sense of curiosity: we are wired to “wonder” what’s around the corner.
- It makes a space feel larger: our brains tend to think the space is a lot larger than it actually is because we can’t see from the front to the back.
- It creates privacy: blocking parts of your landscape from view makes your yard feel cozier and more private than if you could see it all in one go.



This secret garden brick pathway fades away, leaving you wondering what’s around the corner.

Tim Cooper (CC0 1.0) via Unsplash.

Stand at the beginning of the walkway and look towards the end of the walkway. Try to spot a point in the walkway that you could potentially “hide” with landscaping. Then, just place a beautiful shrub or some ornamental grasses at the point where the path starts to curve so you can’t see the end.

If you’re nervous about trying this with a permanent structure, try grabbing a large planter or even a bucket. Place it where you think the shrub should go, then look again from the beginning of the walkway and see how it looks.

Another way you can hide parts of your garden from view is through a structure like a fence, an arbor or even a gate. Using an arbor as an “entrance” to a back garden is a wonderful way to

welcome people into your landscape and also create curiosity. A passerby will instinctively think... I wonder what's on the other side?

Incorporate Focal Points



Focal point in Preston Manor Walled Garden, Brighton, England (June). Mark Wordy (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.

Ahhh... using focal points is another fantastic garden design trick that is so easy to try at home. Placing focal points in your landscape gives a person's eyes a place to focus and rest upon.

You can see how this works so well in this photo. The white statue on a pedestal is a place to rest your eyes in a sea of green foliage. It's such a beautiful and simple execution of a garden focal point.

Some other focal point ideas are garden sculptures, planters, benches, arbors, walls, water features, fire pits... even a unique plant in a bright color can serve as a focal point! The sky's the limit!



Left: Rusted barrel focal point against old brick, Falconhurst Open Garden, Kent. Right: Sculpture focal point at the end of a path lined with greenery, Preston Manor Walled Garden, Brighton, England (June). Mark Wordy (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.

Garden designers also use focal points to lead a viewer around or through a landscape. If your focal point is interesting and unique, it will also help to guide the viewer further into your landscape to explore!

Lay Out Your Design

How to Arrange Plants in Garden Beds



It may appear that plants were just dropped randomly into this mixed border, but there are definite design principles used to master this look (Bramdean House Open Garden, England). Mark Wordy (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.

Here are some simple ways that you can arrange plants in your landscape for that beautiful layered look that you want. Use these steps to create a more professional and organic looking garden at home.

ARRANGE PLANTS IN THE GARDEN

1 DRIFTS

GROUPINGS OF THE SAME PLANT



2 FOCAL POINT

ARRANGE PLANTS AROUND A FOCAL POINT



3 LINE UP

MAKE 3 STRAIGHT ROWS




4 WEAVE

WEAVE PLANTS IN AND OUT OF ROWS



Illustration by Amy Fedele of Pretty Purple Door.



Plant in drifts of 3, 5 or 7 plants.

When you arrange plants in drifts it gives a bigger impact to your landscape. No more buying just one plant. You should buy several of the same type of plant so that you can make a grouping of them. This will give you a better overall look to your garden.

Create a focal point & plant in drifts around it.

Another way that you can arrange plants in your landscape is by creating a focal point. Pick a superstar plant that you love or even position a sculpture or other object as the focus of your garden bed. Then arrange plants around the focal point to bring it all together.

Arrange your plants in rows

Creating rows in the garden is another simple way to arrange plants when you aren't sure what to do. Arrange the tallest plants in the back, the medium-sized plants in the center and the lowest growing plants in the front to create a foreground, middle-ground and a background in your garden.

Weave plants in and out of the rows.

To put a spin on this row concept, what you can do is create your rows, then weave plants in and out of the 3 layers.

- Weave some of your middle ground plants into the background.
- Or weave some of the smaller middle ground plants into the foreground.

How To Make Plant Combinations

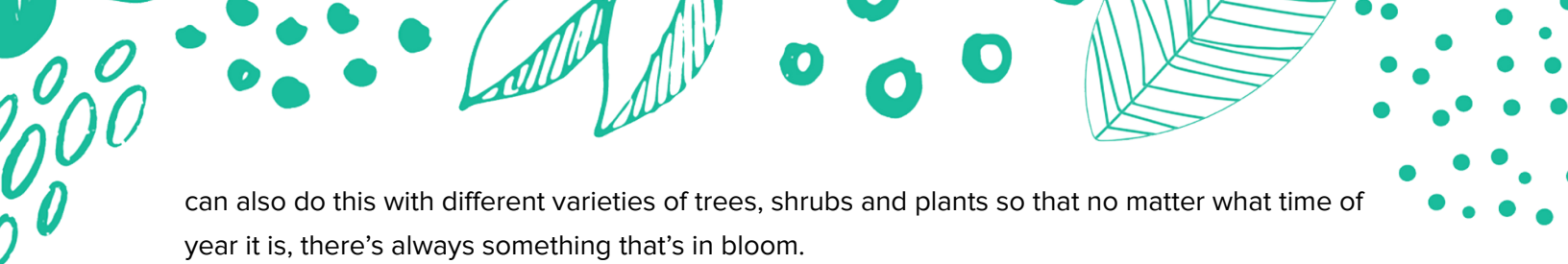
In addition to mixing plants within your garden bed, you should think about the qualities and characteristics of your plants and how they will work together. Once you master the art of pairing plants, you'll be able to create interesting moments throughout your landscape that will make it special and unique. These are the details that will set your garden apart from most home landscapes.

Bloom Sequencing

Create seasonal gardens within your landscape by grouping plants that bloom sequentially.

Bloom sequencing is the process of choosing plants that bloom one after another in the garden. You can do this using the same variety of plant, like sequentially blooming alliums or astilbe. You





can also do this with different varieties of trees, shrubs and plants so that no matter what time of year it is, there's always something that's in bloom.

Why Bloom Sequencing is Difficult to Achieve in the Home Landscape

The unspoken truth about creating a layered landscape is that garden centers are secretly setting you up to fail. Garden centers only have a certain amount of space to sell flowers and shrubs... so they actually put out NEW plant varieties every week so that their stock is always in bloom.

And because most gardeners don't understand what I call bloom sequencing, they head to the garden center, frenzied with spring fever buying "all the plants" in one trip. But if you do this, two weeks later the blooms will fade and you'll be left wondering what the heck happened or what you did wrong.

In reality, the garden center kind of screwed you. But, once you understand bloom sequencing and how to find off-season blooming plants, you can create a garden with endless color in all four seasons.

Bloom Sequencing Tips

Here are some things you can do to avoid this common issue:

- Visit the garden center **multiple times a year**. If your garden is not looking great, head to the garden center THAT week to find something to fill in the bloom gap.
- **Create a plan** ahead of time so that you buy plants that are long-blooming and give you the look you want.
- Get to know the plants in your garden. When do they bloom and for how long? **Creating a bloom chart** is a great way to ensure something is always blooming. Take note of the start and end of each plant's bloom period.

Color Combinations

Many beginner gardeners don't think much about garden color schemes other than they want a lot of color — the more the better. Choosing too many colors for your garden can result in a wild mess that you likely won't be happy with.

It's easy for me to say "choose a color scheme and stick with it." But... It can be overwhelming to choose a color scheme if you are just a beginner at gardening. So, here are some of my tips for locking down your garden color scheme:

Take cues from your clothes and your home decor.

When you plan your home decor, you rely on color to tie your room together. When you get dressed in the morning, you pick your clothing based on color schemes. So, why do we treat our gardens so differently... combining colors together that we'd never put in our homes or on our bodies? Take cues from how you dress and decorate to get inspiration for your garden.

Decide on the energy of your garden.

Depending on the color “temperature” the colors in your garden can evoke different energy. So, it's important to first decide what type of feeling you want to convey with your garden.

Do you want a garden that's **relaxing and calm**? For peaceful gardens, you want to keep the color temperature cool and the contrast to a minimum. I'd recommend blue, purple, blue green and as a bonus... white! But, any color will work to create peace and calmness as long as you limit your color palette.



Left: A mix of pink, purple and white blooms create a peaceful, yet playful, design (Mottisfont Abbey Garden, UK). Mark Wordy (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr. Right: Pops of pinks and oranges ignite this garden, while whites and pale blues attempt to calm it down. You can just feel the energy vibrating from this mixed border (Cameron Highlands, Malaysia). Phuketian.S (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.

Do you want a garden that's **vibrant and energizing**? For exciting gardens, keep the color temperature warm and amp up the contrast. I'd recommend red, orange and yellow to spice it up. Throw in some blues to cool this combination down and add an element of surprise.



This garden filled with reds, oranges and yellows is vibrant and energizing. But, hits of blue and white cool things down (Loseley Park Garden, Surrey). Mark Wordy (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.



A monochromatic color scheme doesn't have to be boring, as shown in this whimsical purple foundation planting designed by Amy Fedele. Amy Fedele (All Rights Reserved) via Pretty Purple Door.

Choose one color at first.

To get started, all you need to do is choose one single color — that's it! Pick your favorite color and this will be the beginning of your color scheme! If you choose purple, try to find some plants in light purples, medium purples and even dark purples to mix it up.

Keeping your color scheme simple at first will limit your plant choices, which can be a very good thing. It's a great way to create a cohesive garden while avoiding overwhelm.

Hone your garden over time.

Once you get the base color, style and feeling in place, you can begin to incorporate more plant combinations, colors and focal points into your garden beds. But, take things one step at a time!

Texture



Textured stone with textured conifer at Kipling Gardens, Rottingdean, England. Mark Wordy (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr.

When you're designing a landscape that you want to look professional, using plant texture can be your secret weapon to keeping things interesting! Texture is a wonderful and VERY overlooked design principle in the home landscape.

The truth is that most home gardeners rely on the color of blooming flowers WAY too much. But, when the blooms are done, what does the landscape look like? This is where texture is your best friend. Placing plants with opposite textures next to each other in a landscape makes your garden beds look interesting and beautiful, even when they aren't in bloom.

A simple rule of thumb when choosing texture is to pair opposite textures together. Play soft textures off of hard ones. Spikes against curves. Little needles against big ones.



Left: Textured Succulents. Yen Vu (CC0 1.0) via Unsplash. Right: Textured ornamental cabbage. Peyman Farmani (CC0 1.0) via Unsplash.

Layering Tips for Beautiful Borders

- Refer to the Planting Pyramid to Keep your landscape balanced.
- Research and planning is Key. Consider maintenance requirements. Put the "right plant in the right place" according to its climate, sun & soil preferences.
- Choose a garden style, theme and color palette to guide plant choices. Choose tall, medium and short plants that fit the criteria.
- Less is more. Plant odd numbered groups (5, 7, 9 or even 11) of the same plant to create a mass. Big clumps of fewer types of plants will anchor your border and keep it looking full but not messy.
- Plant tightly for a full border and more impact. It's easier to curtail than encourage growth.
- Plant a succession of "excite" flowers for spring, summer and autumn (bloom sequencing). What plant will be memorable in each season? Tall, structural plants (these can be annuals) add excitement & lift to the border. Always consider what will bloom next. What will be the star of the border after the current star fades?
- Arrange plants informally according to size.
 - Select tall, structural accent plant(s) for the back of the border.
 - Choose long-blooming plants to fill in the middle of the border.
 - Plant short perennials in the front. Low-growing shrubs and grasses create a nice edge for the front of the border.
- Use design principles like structure, repetition, scale, balance, unity, flow and color when creating your planting plan.
- Use focal points (plants or something else?) to move the eye down the border.
- Provide enough contrast between plants that are close to each other. Look for contrast in size, texture, form and color as you position plants.
- Water plants well for the first 3 weeks after planting (if there's no rain). Once established, plants tend to care for themselves.
- Fertility is the Key to a successful mixed border. Mulch with garden compost or soil improver after cutting your border back in the spring.
- In late summer, evaluate your planting and write down your observations. A mixed border will evolve & change each year as you learn and grow as a gardener.

Master the Mixed Border

ONCE YOU'VE CHOSEN YOUR PLANTS, REVISIT THIS CHECKLIST TO ENSURE YOU AREN'T MISSING ANYTHING.

- I've decided on a garden style or theme to guide my plant choices.
- I have walls, fences and/or other structural elements in place or planned so my garden has bones.
- I've included plants from every layer of the pyramid.
- I've planned the location of my trees and evergreens first.
- My layered garden bed is at least 6' deep.
- I am placing deciduous trees and shrubs in front of taller evergreens.
- I've chosen a color scheme and all my plants fit into it.
- I've researched the light, moisture and soil requirements for each plant and I'm confident I can provide them.
- I've researched each plant's maintenance requirements and it fits my lifestyle.
- I've included the right proportions of plants (more plants in the categories near the bottom vs. the top).
- I've created a foreground, middleground and background layer of plants.
- I've paired plants with contrasting textures and colors to create more interest.
- I'm planting groupings of 3, 5 or 7 perennials vs. dotting single plants around the border.

What's Next?

If you enjoyed this eBook and are looking for more guidance, I invite you to consider enrolling in my [Design Your 4 Season Garden online course](#).



In the course, I'll cover these Landscape Layering concepts via video lessons, complete with a workbook, garden planning worksheets and other planning resources. You'll also have access to a private Facebook community filled with friendly home gardeners who are learning garden design right along with you. This is a great option if you have questions about your design and are looking for my personal feedback on your plans before moving forward.

As a thank you for reading, you can apply your eBook purchase price directly to the online course by entering the coupon code **LAYERS20** at checkout.

I do check to make sure that those using the code have purchased the eBook first, so please don't share this special discount code with anyone else!

- Learn more about the course at prettypurpledoor.com/course.
- See all products available for purchase at prettypurpledoor.com/shop-learn.

About the Author

I'm Amy and I'm the founder of Pretty Purple Door. I've been a garden designer since 2014 and graphic designer since 2005. My work has been featured in publications like The Family Handyman, Buzzfeed, Country Living Magazine and more.

I help home gardeners design impressively beautiful landscapes that are colorful in all four seasons, show off your personality and suit your lifestyle. My straight-forward process will help you SOLVE your landscape problems and turn you into the neighborhood garden guru that everyone goes to for advice.



You might be surprised to hear that I didn't ALWAYS have a passion for gardening. In fact, back in 2012 when I bought my house I didn't have a CLUE what to plant. I begged my sister-in-law to take me to the nursery and made her pick practically every plant for me.

I just didn't GET gardening... How did she know what plant worked with what? How do you make them all work together? And what did it all really matter anyway? To me, landscaping was just another thing to check off my extremely long "new homeowner" to-do list.

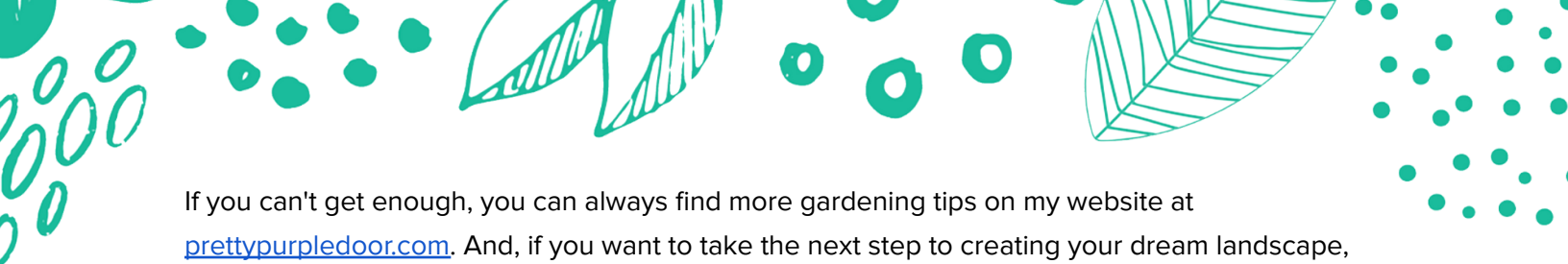
So I took the plants (and my sister-in-law) home with me. I dutifully dug holes as she pointed to the spots where I was to put these new plants. I stuck them in the ground and followed her instructions for caring for them. After a week or two something unexpected happened. Low and behold, all my plants were thriving... growing... blooming. It looked amazing, bright and colorful! I found myself going outside every day to discover each new blooming surprise.

On one of those days as I stepped back to take it all in, something hit me. My inner-artist took over (I've always loved to paint). It was one of those AH-HA moments.

I finally realized that a garden is kind of like a canvas... an ever-changing canvas of color and shape and texture and form and movement. All of the things I love about art and creativity were perfectly aligned with this beautiful landscape garden that I once cared nothing about.

Now, I absolutely love to garden. And I love finding new ways to squeeze in more color and personality. I can't imagine my life without this joyous hobby.

My hope for this eBook is for you to have that same experience-- your "AH-HA" moment. I hope that once you see how layering plants and planning for all four seasons will make your garden shine in a better, brighter, more dramatic way, you're going to be hooked, too!



If you can't get enough, you can always find more gardening tips on my website at prettypurpledoor.com. And, if you want to take the next step to creating your dream landscape, check out my online gardening courses at prettypurpledoor.com/courses.

Amy Fedele

prettypurpledoor@gmail.com

Zone 6B, Northeast PA

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