A Good Design Creates A Better Landscape

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You basically have two choices when it comes to creating a personal and functional design for your yard: You can hire a landscape designer or you can do it yourself.

For those of you who decide to hire someone, consider doing it now. Landscape designers are typically not as busy during the winter months. You won't wait as long for the initial consultation. That shrinks wait-time for the finished plan. During the consultation, designers don't feel rushed, giving them more time to concentrate on your personal needs so they can create a document that truly reflects your taste and personality.

For those of you who are ready to take on designing your own landscape, here are some things to consider:

- Get a feel for what you like by leafing through magazines or driving through neighborhoods.
- Take cues from the style of your house because some things just don't work. For example, tropical plants do a poor job of supporting a two-story colonial home.
- Consider vantage points. The most obvious view is from the street. It's not so much what is in the bed, but the bedlines themselves. Bold and bending bedlines read well and help create intimate spaces for placement of everything from plants to garden art.

Another important view is from inside the house. Think about where you spend the most time, and then think about what you see when you look outside. This would be a good place to create an area that gives a feeling of enjoyment versus embarrassment or stress.

Decide what you want incorporated into your landscape. Do you want to have a vegetable garden, cut-flower garden, bird garden, water feature or compost area, or would you like to have a tidy landscape with practically no maintenance? Also, think about the functionality of your landscape. Do you have children who need a place to play? Maybe you want a place to cook-out, watch wildlife or sunbathe. Make a list of what you want and let your plan reflect your personal needs.

Now to the part that so many folks neglect: the drawing. The easiest way to do this is to find your survey plan - the plan that shows your property line and where your house sits on the property. If you own your home, it is most likely with your purchasing paperwork. If you don't have one or can't find it, just sketch out the property, house and any other hardscape, such as the driveway, patio, sidewalk, that pertains to the area you want to landscape. The more detailed you are, the easier it will be to estimate how many plants and materials you'll need.

Begin by sketching out your bedlines. It is a good idea to connect all the beds around the house,
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typically, breaking at entryways. Curved bedlines usually read better than straight, and remember to keep the width of your beds proportional to the size of your home.

After you have your beds on paper, it's time to fill them with plants. If you are not an avid gardener, try shopping at a reputable nursery where the staff is knowledgeable and can help you select plants that complement your yard. Take your drawing in (along with any photos of the area) and let the staff show you things that will work. Garden centers, like designers, are typically slow during the winter months so that the staff can give you personal attention and more time to help with plant selection.

Another option is culling information from books and the Internet. Just make sure you select plants that thrive in our zone (8b).

Assessing your needs, determining your boundaries and creating a plan are essential in beginning any new project. Building a personal and functional outdoor space is a project that should reward you and your family many times over.

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