

## Foundation Planting Ties the House to the Landscape

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Here's a chance to show off your landscape. I'm looking for attractive photos of foundation plantings for homes. Let me give you more of the details.

The foundation planting is the planting around the base of the house. As some landscape designers say, it is the planting that ties the house to the ground and to the surrounding landscape. Without some type of foundation planting, a house usually looks a little lost just sitting there.

The more experienced I have become with plants and landscaping, the more challenging I have found it to develop

good foundation plantings. There's no doubt that I have become more discriminating over the years in terms of what I consider a "good" foundation planting. But, there are other reasons that I think foundation plantings are more challenging today.

Contemporary architecture has larger and lower windows. Often there is a low porch on the front the house. We don't want to cover these attractive features of the house. So, generally, today we want the plants in the foundation planting to stay lower.

Most of us don't want plants that have to be pruned frequently to keep them lower. We don't have time for frequent pruning. Disposing of the clippings or prunings is more difficult today because of landfill restrictions. And many of us have found out the hard way, with frequent pruning, we often end up with plants with holes in them. There is a lot of leaf growth on the surface, but nothing but a thick mass of twigs inside. So, once we get a hole in the surface leaf growth of a shrub, it's very difficult to get it to fill in.

We also don't want foundation plants that require a lot of water or pesticides to keep them healthy. So our plants must be low-growing, and they must be relatively tough.

Furthermore, just as our architecture has changed, so has our taste in plants. As we have many more choices today, our tastes in landscape plants is generally more sophisticated. We are tired of the same old look of just boxwood, podocarpus, pittosporum, or dwarf hollies in the landscape. There is absolutely nothing wrong with using some of these old standards in the foundation planting. But, we want more. Something with more interest. We don't just want green. We want different shades and textures and forms of green.

Because of the need for lower-growing plants in the foundation planting, there are many "groundcover" type plants used in foundation plantings today. 'Evergreen Giant' liriopse has

become very popular as have various ferns. Irises of various types are used because of their interesting leaf form and texture. Mondo grass is even used in some foundation plantings because of its very low growth habit, fine texture, and extremely dark, rich green color.

A plant that I've become very fond of in foundation plantings, in shaded areas, for all the previously mentioned reasons, is aspidistra or cast-iron plant. Yes, aspidistra does spread over time. But, digging up clumps of it to stop its spread every four or five years is a small price to pay for a plant that asks for absolutely no upkeep the rest of the time.

We even use herbs and perennials in foundation plantings today. Rosemary, in its various cultivars, can be a stunning foundation plant in a sunny landscape. There are many ginger plants that can be used. Just remember that ginger plants die back for the winter, so use them in moderation.

Ornamental grasses have somewhat the same limitation, though many of them remain attractive into the winter with their straw-colored foliage and seedheads.

Foundation plantings can be very simple and still make a powerful statement. For example, two simple, formally-sheared boxwoods, one on each side of the front entrance of a house can give a look of orderliness. Of course, the architecture of the house has to match the planting.

Now back to my plea for photos. If you have a photo of what you consider to be an innovative, attractive foundation planting, in-scale with the house, with plants that have relatively low maintenance requirements, please send it to me. If you have an electronic image of good enough resolution that it can fill the computer screen and still be clear, you can e-mail it to me at davidm@mail.co.leon.fl.us. Or if you have a regular photo, you can mail it to me at Landscape Photo, 615 Paul Russell Road, Tallahassee FL 32301. I won't be able to send it back to you, though.

The photo doesn't even have to be of your own landscape. I do ask, though, that the photo be from nearby enough that the plants will grow in our area. I would like to pick one or two of the best photos and show them to you in a future column. So, please, get out your camera and give me your best shot.

Some Foundation planting combinations:

- agapanthus, liriope, sago palms
- aspidistra and ferns
- boxwood, aspidistra in pots, ivy
- Evergreen Giant liriope, dwarf yaupons

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