Landscape Design Advice

Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: The front entry, window plantings, and corner accents are the three main areas of focus.

Jake Hartung is a landscape designer at Tallahassee Nurseries, a member of the University of Florida IFAS Leon County Extension Advisory Committee,  http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu/

Thursday, June 19, 2008
Tallahassee Democrat

Landscape design is an art with certain principles that should be understood before starting on your own project. Three main areas of focus include the front entry, window plantings, and corner accents. These important areas give you an easy starting point when approaching a landscape design for your own yard.

Before making a trip to the local nursery take the time to survey your property for specific light conditions in the areas you want to focus on. Walk around the yard several times throughout the day and keep a record of how many hours and at what times of the day each area receives sunlight. This information is crucial for picking the right plant for the right place. Remember, afternoon sun is much more harsh than morning sun in our area.

There are many new introductions of plants this year, making the design process even more enjoyable. Agapanthus, or lily of the Nile, is bursting at the seams with new cultivars, and they make a perfect front entry plant. 'Storm Cloud' sends up deep bluish-purple flower stalks that can reach up to six feet tall! Another striking selection is 'Mood Indigo', which has shorter stalks at three feet, but the color is a dramatic dark blue. There are also two new dwarf agapanthus named 'Blue Storm' and 'Snow Storm' which keep their stalks at just two feet tall. Overall, these new cultivars have been bred to bloom more prolifically than the old standard type of agapanthus.
Finding plants that will not engulf front windows can be tricky, but there are some new evergreen shrubs that do the trick. 'Grace Hendricks Phillips' boxwood is a dwarf variety that reaches only two feet tall, making it a great choice for planting under extremely low windows or even for knot gardens. It can handle the full sun and does not require the constant pruning that the Japanese boxwood needs. Some other new selections for low window plantings include 'Don's Dwarf' Wax Myrtle, 'Mojo' Pittosporum, and 'Purple Pixie' Loropetalum. All of these are worth checking out.

The most colorful category of large growing shrubs is loropetalum. Their color and size make loropetalums a fabulous choice as an accent at the corner of a house. 'Purple Diamond' is a Southern Living selection and reaches four to six feet tall with a beautiful deep purple foliage color all year. 'Ever Red' is the most striking of the new loropetalums, with truly red blooms on almost black foliage! This one is a real show-stopper, maturing at six feet tall.

Simple landscape design can be an enjoyable project for everyone, from beginning gardeners to those green thumbs that have been doing it for years. But to achieve your individual goals, be sure to talk with local nursery employees to make sure your choices will thrive in your landscape for years of enjoyment!