

Structure and Ornamentation in the Garden

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Defining “Hardscape” - Includes any garden feature that is not a plant...arbors, artwork, benches, birdbaths, containers, decks, fences, fountains, gates, patios, ponds, pools, statuary, trellises, or other types of structures and/or ornamentations.

Function

A key factor in working out a garden design is function. At an early stage, analyze your or your family's needs and recognize that needs evolve. If there are younger children in the family, the demands they make on the garden will change as they grow. Always remember that your own garden must be planned to satisfy you and your family, and not necessarily others. It is up to the gardener to be his or her own designer. Looking closely at pictures and diagrams of other people's designs and ideas can be a wonderful source of inspiration.

Observe and Study the Site

Good garden designers first observe and study their site to discover its strengths and weaknesses. Check that your planning ideas are practical as well as visually satisfying from all angles. Look at the site from several vantage points—from an upstairs window, from ground level, from outside the site. Walk the pathways you have outlined, making sure there is room for a wheelbarrow or mower and that you can easily get around corners. The location of the main house, outbuildings, walls, fences, decks, patios, and walks will determine how they can be included in any proposed garden spaces. Observe the comfort spots where it simply feels good to be. Spaces that encourage activity will stand out as candidates for areas to play or entertain. Deciphering these intangible qualities will influence crucial design decisions throughout the making of your garden. One needs to choose, or create, a place to view the garden.

Providing a sense of enclosure is one of the most important aspects of designing landscape. Without it, the broad landscape can be uncomfortable and uninviting. Enclosure can be achieved with walls, partial walls, fences, trellises and vines, tall and/or large shrubs. Enclosures provide privacy, mask neighborhood noise, protection against strong winds, create comfortably warm spots in sunny areas, add horizontal or vertical interest, and can unify a house and garden.

Expand your spaces by creating views with stopping points and moments of interest with walkways, steps, and patios and positioning focal points throughout the garden. Paths beckon and invite you into a garden and give structure to the garden and direction to its visitors. Paths urge you to slow down for a look underfoot and may even eventually create themselves: You cut across the lawn to the mailbox, the compost pile, the greenhouse, or the gate enough times and soon a path of flattened grass marks your trail. Before that happens, map out circulation patterns in your garden and draw a plan--one that allows just enough twists and turns to reveal the garden slowly, area by area. Steps

must be gentle, low, and wide in order to be gracious and inviting. Steps built in the same or similar material as surrounding structures will blend in well and become a pleasing part of the structural pattern of a garden. Gardens constructed on different levels with steps between them may present problems for wheelbarrows and mowers. A garden can do with a little mystery, which serpentine paths provide.

Questions that you should ask yourself?

Look at your area and ask yourself, “What am I going to be using this area for?” or “What’s going to happen in this space?” “Are you going to have an ‘eating area’?” If so, allow at least 3 feet of open space around patio furniture to ensure easy passage. Do you want to erect this structure for purely aesthetic (artistic or visual) reasons? Will it serve a more useful function? Where would I like my “sitting and relaxing area” be located? If you are shading an outdoor sitting or dining area, you will need to consider protection from the sun and wind patterns where every shade and breeze in Texas in the summer is a blessing. You need to create a landscape design that is designed for your lifestyle that will be safe and secure. You’ll want to create a pleasant and relaxing scenery that provides a “sense of place” where you feel like you belong. Would you like to have different kinds of gardens? What kind of maintenance (mowing, watering, pruning, trimming, etc.) will be required? Have you located all cable, telephone, electric, water and gas pipes and have them flagged?

These are a few of the things you need to think about BEFORE you go shopping or do anything. If you don’t, you’ll probably end up shopping and spending a lot more money. It’s kind of like grocery shopping. You go to the grocery store to get a few things and if you don’t have a list and stick to it, you’ll come home with twice as much stuff.

Creating “Rooms”

Create “rooms” to make the garden seem larger by using hedges, borders, and fences as walls and arbors and gates as doors. Think of the “rooms” in terms of function-play, dining, gardening, lawn, or service.

It is certain that hardscape will enhance a garden if used properly, and a garden in turn enhances the hardscape that becomes a part of it. Structures provide the backbone to a plan. They do not change with seasons and, therefore, provide continuing importance. Structures are used as focal points and can create movement, direction, and sound, or define a sense of time or place. They can create a mood, stir emotions, or evoke memories. Structures provide great pleasure and can be functional and provide support for plants, food for birds, or water for butterflies.

When using structures and ornamentations in the garden, it is advisable to consider aspects of design such as appropriateness, scale, and the design principles of order, unity, and rhythm. Restraint could also be added...remember, “Less is often more.”

First, let's consider appropriateness in character or scale. It is easy to see how, for example, a stone Buddha would be out of place in a lovely cottage garden. When shopping for structures and ornamentations, bear in mind the style of the garden and its location. Make selections that are in keeping with the natural materials or styles to intensify a sense of place. For example, select pots that carry the same hues (colors) as the hardscaping material or house.

Consider the mood you want to create when purchasing ornamentations such as ornament's colors, the material it is made from and its character. The mood in the garden changes constantly, with the weather and the time of day or year. Structures and ornamentations can carry a garden through its low times, when plantings are not at their peak. Lighting brings charm and a romantic atmosphere to the garden, be it from strings of small white lights, a simple lantern, or highly ornamental fixtures. There is also the "art" created by shadows and reflections from the light itself.

Structures and ornamentations are very effective as anchors for planting, but they need to be of appropriate size for such a function. Be sure the ornament is in scale with the space. Do the size and the placement feel right?

Ornamentation directs the eye's movement through a garden. A structure often serves as a place for the eye to rest, creating a focal point and dominance in an otherwise endless mass of plants. For this reason, it is best not to have two or more different, yet equally dominant, features in the same field of view...the result is confusion and distraction rather than harmony and order. Art in the garden usually slows a visitor's movement through the garden. Placed in the center of the bed, it anchors the garden. Sited in the intersection of converging paths, it acts as a dominant structural element of the design and draws the eye forward, pulling the visitor into the garden. A visitor is compelled to walk in the direction of the sound coming from a fountain, in an attempt to locate it. The presence and weight of art or containers placed at the entrance to a path or home signifies that this is the correct way to go, that a new space waits to be discovered. Art can be repeated at regular intervals along a path or through a bed to create rhythm in the garden; it sets the pace to be followed. A bench or statue, placed at the end of a long path draws visitors toward it. Ornaments can be used to separate or divide a space and can block an area or cause movement into it. Placing matching planted containers or identical pieces of art on either side of a door, path, or gate is an effective way to frame a view through symmetry.

A favorite garden will typically have some sort of structure enhancing it: a winding path to draw the eye through the garden; a neatly raised bed to show off perennials; a trellis to display vines; a water feature that provides relaxation on hot summer days...especially in Texas. Well-conceived structures make any garden more pleasant to savor. The elements or structures serve as backdrops for people and plants. In the case of a structure used as a focal point, more intense detailing or sculpting is appropriate. Scale is important. The designer must think large, for the outdoors requires a larger scale than an indoor room.

Definition of Structures

Arbors and Pergolas

“**Arbor**” is an English word. The American Heritage Dictionary states that an arbor is “a shady resting place in a garden or park, often made of rustic work or latticework on which plants, such as climbing shrubs or vines, are grown.”

An arbor is an open framework with plants climbing over to form a leafy tunnel. Arbors vary in height, but 8-10 feet is about right for most. This provides plenty of headroom, but also makes it easy to prune any vines growing on the arbor. When deciding upon your arbor’s length and width, remember that a roof overhead always makes the floor space below seem smaller than it is. Arbors are often used as a divider or separator to create another area or “room”. An arbor can become a focal point in almost any area of the yard.

People often seem to use “arbors” and “pergolas” interchangeable. What I've concluded is that it depends on what section or part of the country you’re from and "how expensive" or "massive" the structure is, but I really haven't found a dimensional description of either. Pergolas are a long and skinny covering over a pathway while arbors are more of an entertaining area and provide shade....they may have table and chairs, a swing, or benches under the arbor. Pergolas are usually more massive and more expensive than arbors. I always thought arbors were mostly used as a passageway and used to connect one part of the garden to another. If you intend to spend time in your arbor, make sure the views on all sides show your garden at its immaculate best. An arbor should flatter the style of the house. Plant vines that will accent, not overwhelm, an arbor. A well-placed arbor is more than a focal point; it is also a hub of activity in a yard—a place people meet to relax, to dine, to play, etc. An entry arbor is like a front door on the street, helping to dramatize a guest’s arrival. An arbor serves as a constant backdrop whether huge or humble. Arbors are destined to share their space with climbing plants. Arbors encourage you to look skyward and are open and airy. Arbors bring us closer to nature—birds, breezes, and all.

Paul James, The Gardener Guy, states that the main difference in a pergola and an arbor is that the pergola always has a flat top and is usually very architectural in design, is long and narrow with the widest sides of the rectangle always being open. Sometimes, people put a single bench under them or they could be used to cover a walkway. An arbor is more like a garden room with seating.

“**Pergola**” is an Italian word. The American Heritage Dictionary states that a pergola is “an arbor or a passageway of columns supporting a roof of trelliswork on which climbing plants are trained to grow. Pergola structures are more architectural and often have masonry or stone pillars and columns. Pergolas have vines trained to grow up the post, stone pillars and/or columns.” Traditionally used to shade a path, it is now often used as a transition from inside the house to the garage or garden, perhaps connecting with a deck. Erecting a pergola is a great way to create a separate outdoor area just off your house that still connects with the landscape. Consider the weight of whatever you are planting in its

mature state. Consider also density of foliage and how long it is in leaf. A leafless climber will not provide much shade.

Benches

Should be comfortable and easy to get up from the sitting position without problems. They also should be in style to be compatible with their surroundings.

Gazebo

A gazebo is a structure that can range from a simple open platform covered with a canopy to an enclosed playhouse or poolside cabana with facilities for serving meals. There are many designs for gazebos; however, most adhere to the same basics. All require a foundation, posts or walls, beams, rafters and some type of roofing. Cramped quarters are no fun, so a gazebo should be at least 8 feet tall with sufficient floor space to easily accommodate several pieces of furniture—at least 8 feet wide and deep. Gazebo gets its name from the English “gaze” with the Latin “bo” meaning “I shall.” Others hold that the word is a corruption of “gaze about.” Gazebos can be round, square, hexagonal or octagonal.

Obelisk

An obelisk offers vertical interest to a garden and provides support for vines. It is a tall, four-sided, pyramidal structure usually made of iron or wood and used to support the growth of vines; may also be a similarly shaped garden ornament made of stone. Obelisks are invaluable as repeating elements. An obelisk is a pillar having a rectangular cross section tapering towards a pyramidal top.

Trellis

An open vertical latticework that does not extend overhead is called a trellis. Trellising can create a feeling of enclosure or privacy without blocking the sun and breeze or totally eliminating the view. Some of the most attractive trellises are those that are partially covered with vines. Trellising enables the gardener to grow plants in a vertical plane. A trellis covered in lush foliage makes an ideal backdrop for a bench, while a vine-covered iron arch makes a wonderful garden entrance.

Tuteur

A tuteur is a garden tower used to train vines. A tuteur or a vine tower can be any size and a variety of shapes, but generally it is pyramidal in form. Tuteur comes from the French for “trainer”, a classic French design for a trellis in the shape of an obelisk. The tuteur is a tapering, four-sided trellis ideal for growing vines. Tuteurs can be found made out of metal, wood or bamboo. Placed in the garden they add a vertical interest to any garden bed that may be lacking in height. Tuteurs can also be used in the vegetable garden for growing any kind of twining vegetable like pole beans.

Walkways and pathways in the garden should be 5 feet wide.

Curved paths reveal the garden gradually, allowing for surprise with sculptures, trellises, arbors, water features, etc. A winding path draws the eye through the garden.

Focal points will draw people down the paths. Walks, steps, terraces, decks, fences, and gates all generally fit into this category. Gates don't have to be boring...they can add tremendously to the garden's spirit, depending on their style and composition. They don't even have to be part of a fence but can stand alone to signify a change of space.

The ranges of materials suitable for design are endless. Drainage considerations, safety, maintenance, and cost help determine choices. Gravel, concrete, asphalt, stone, brick, tile and wood are among the most common materials chosen, due to their durability. With a generous design, paving is simply for unity. Walks should be 5 feet wide to accommodate 2 people side by side. Heavily used outdoor rooms or terraces might have a durable wearing surface like stone or concrete. As slopes may dictate, decks are a delightful possibility for increasing usable outdoor floor space. Decks often solve disturbance of fragile slopes and protect tree roots from compaction.

Rules of Creating a path

1. **Choose the right materials.** The most durable paths are designed for use in all weather conditions. Good drainage when it's wet, good traction when it's icy. Gravel and crushed rock are good choices as are loose-laid brick, pavers, textured concrete, bricks, or stone. Use solid paths (brick, concrete, pavers or stone) for routes that you're likely to travel barefoot (for example: the path from hot tub to house), so you won't pick up dirt on wet feet. Use bark or gravel in places that call for a more natural look.
2. **Make it wide enough.** Main garden paths should be wide enough for two people to walk side by side, 5 feet is about right. Small subsidiary paths should be wide enough for a wheelbarrow (handles have a 24-30-inch spread). Two feet is a generous minimum, as long as plants don't crowd the edges. Organize a network of paths like a river system, with smaller paths feeding into larger ones.
3. **Add plants wherever possible.** Allow at least 2 inches of soil between pavers, stones, or bricks in which to plant thyme or other low creepers. Amend the soil well so plants can establish roots; it should be light (on the sandy side) so it won't become packed down with foot traffic and kill the plants' roots.
4. **Which path is for you?**
 - A. Before building a path, you need to decide what materials you will use and prepare the site. Concrete, aggregate, bark, gravel and stones can be set directly on stable soil; paths of other materials need a base. Sand is a good choice, but be careful: It can wash out from under pavers and bricks, making them settle unevenly, especially in rainy areas. To prevent washout, layer sand over a 2-inch gravel base. Many people also put landscaping fabric under any loose-laid material (like gravel) to keep it from mixing with the sand or soil below. That can be effective,

but often the fabric's edges work up to the surface. Keep the fabric down by stuffing its edges under the bender boards. You can make grade changes either with steps or simply by sloping the path.

B. Install bender board edging first then put down landscape fabric to prevent weeds. Secure fabric edges under the bender board edging.

C. Pour a 2-inch-thick layer of sand over the landscape fabric, raking it smooth. (In rainy areas, put down a 2-inch gravel layer first.)

D. As you rake, moisten the sand with a fine spray from the hose.

E. Firm the sand. Using a drum roller or a hand tamper, pass over the moist sand several times to pack it down.

F. Add steppingstones then wiggle them in so they're firmly embedded.

G. To finish, fill cracks between stones with gravel or to hold flagstones more firmly, use something smaller like decomposed granite.

Accessories

Accessories in the landscape enrich outdoor space. Accessories include such items as planters, sculpture, water features, outdoor furniture, gazebos, pergolas, obelisk, trellises, tuteurs, a swing or glider, birdbaths, signs, light fixtures, trash receptacles and many other landscape features. The list conveys a sense of clutter and disharmony. However, through proper planning and design much can be done to eliminate this sense of clutter and provide a sense of unity. Balance and harmony can be achieved if care is given to the selection and placement of landscape accessories.

Webster defines an accessory as “an object or device not essential in itself, but adding to the beauty, convenience or effectiveness of something else.” An accessory should be used in a way that will not compete with the total design. Each accessory should appear as an integral part of the total design.

Sculpture and other types of outdoor art serve aesthetic purposes. Sculpture can be used to embellish an outdoor space and create a focal point. Outdoor furniture serves a functional purpose by providing comfort and convenience for the user. The role of a pergola is both aesthetic and functional. It enhances the visual landscape, defines space, creates human scale space, and supplies shade for the comfort of the user. The following questions should be asked to determine whether or not an accessory is necessary.

- 1) Does it have a purpose?
- 2) Will it be interesting and beautiful?
- 3) Can it fit into or relate to the overall design?

When selecting an accessory, one must ask if it will visually relate to the character of the other design features. Will this bench be complementary with its surroundings? The visual relationship or “visual unity” to the total design concept can be achieved in many ways...the use of similar materials, similar form, color, texture, scale and style. For example, if a bench is to provide rest and relaxation for its user, it must be comfortable. The “durability” of an accessory is an equally important consideration.

It must withstand the anticipated use and abuse. It must withstand climatic conditions such as freezing, thawing, intense sunlight and maintenance requirements also need to be considered.

Placement of Accessories

The placement of landscape accessories is an important design consideration. Their arrangement should be worked out as part of the overall design in order for them to appear to be part of a unified design. The function or use of an accessory must be kept in mind when determining its placement. They need to be located where they will be used. Quite often several accessories can be combined into one design element.

Sculpture

The use of sculptures to enrich an outdoor space can serve as a focal point to add visual interest and embellish an area. A sculpture must be compatible with its surroundings. Vistas, viewing places, scale, character, lighting and background are all important considerations. The background should be kept simple to direct attention to the art object. The scale of the artwork to its surroundings requires careful consideration. Artwork elevated on a pedestal requires the viewer to look up which evokes a sense of awe in the viewer.

Outdoor Furniture

In selecting outdoor furniture, it is important that they be comfortable, practical, durable and of an appropriate size, scale and style to be compatible with their surroundings.

Fountains and Water Features

A single feature in a garden can provide an anchor to an overall design. Water, for example, is a powerful visual element, and a pool or pond can determine both garden style and planting. Water features are considered by most people to be one of the most delightful elements in the garden. The obvious spot to place a water feature is where everybody can enjoy it. Water features from small to large may be a consideration for your garden whether it is in the form of a fountain, a pond, hot tub or a swimming pool. Bringing water into the garden brings light from the sky down to the horizontal plane. It reflects the clouds, ripples with the wind and sparkles in the sun. It implies coolness on the hottest day. Water features should be about creating a relaxing spot that you come home to at the end of the day, kick your shoes off, listen to the soothing babbling water and relax and unwind. When thinking about a water feature, you might consider placing it in a spot where there are less trees close by to avoid leaves that might cover the pond in fall when they become deciduous or shade the water in summer. The sound of running water is soothing, and attracts a variety of wildlife. Fountains and other types of water features can be used to create interest in outdoor spaces. Water can be calm, reflective, gurgling, gushing, trickling or turbulent. Each of these effects produces a different mood or character for a water feature. The sight and sound of water develops a strong attraction

for people; they are drawn to the water's edge. Water features can be costly and generally require a substantial amount of maintenance.

Avoid Clutter

- Avoid the temptation to include too many accessories or garden décor items.
- Placing two of the same object such as pots or statues on opposite ends of a path is a great way of adding depth and defining the length of the path.
- Large sculptures placed at the end of a path tend to draw people on to the end and create a pleasing focal point. Remember that white statues or practically anything white create a focal point that draws the eye to itself.
- Accessories should not compete with each other for visual interest. “Sometimes less is more”. A landscape accessory should create a unified design.

Lighting Basics

Lighting the garden allows you to see your creation in a whole new way, emphasizing form, pattern, texture and shadow. Outdoor lighting serves a practical purpose too: A series of lamps can guide visitors safely along a path, while perimeter lighting can discourage intruders.

Good lighting begins with a plan. Before installing fixtures, think of the effect you want to achieve. A light mounted high in a tree can cast dappled “moonlight” on the ground. A single strand of lights placed along an arbor makes any evening a festive occasion.

You can achieve many interesting effects through the creative use of lighting, such as illuminating sculptural tree trunks, spotlighting garden art and casting plant silhouettes onto walls. In most gardens, low-voltage systems will do the trick. They're easy to install and easy to adjust, and they use less energy than standard-current fixtures. Some outdoor lights such as lanterns, path lights, and wall-mounted units are made to be seen, but most are meant to blend with the background. For this reason, be sure to hide the fixtures as well as you can and aim them so that the light bulbs are shielded from direct view. The idea is to make your garden, not your lights, the star of the show.

- 1) Backlighting gives lacy shrubs a delicate glow.
- 2) Path lights can edge walks or shine down from eaves.
- 3) Side lighting dense plants define shape and detail.
- 4) “Moonlighting” creates soft pools of light.
- 5) Shadowing casts plant silhouettes against walls.
- 6) Up lighting reveals form and canopy of trees.
- 7) “Grazing” showcases structure and texture.

Potential Additions to the Landscape

- 1) New paved areas for use
- 2) Benches or seating

- 3) Retaining walls and steps if necessary to make some of the site usable
- 4) Masses of annual flowers for color
- 5) Dramatic landscape lighting
- 6) Berms and baffles for human scale and visual definition
- 7) Vines, hanging baskets, espaliers, etc.
- 8) Sculpture, statuary and artifacts for focal points.

Sources:

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