FOREVER GARDENS

Central Texas winters are perfect for planning new and revamping existing landscapes. A few simple design basics can help eliminate guesswork and pitfalls in creating a fabulous landscape.

In the front yard, three simple steps will help draw your eye to the front door, which should be your focal point.

1. Widen existing sidewalks to 4 feet. Not only will this create a larger funnel to the front door, but will also allow visitors to walk side by side and not single file. This does not have to be an expensive re-pouring of cement, but can simply be done by adding pavers of some sort to the sides.
2. Placement of plants can also draw the eye toward the door. Taller plants should be placed at the ends of the house and shorter plants nearer the door.
3. Balance large garage doors, driveways and carports with a larger planting in the opposite side of the yard. This could be a tree, large specimen shrub or a bed.

Placement of trees, ornamental or shade types should be thought out carefully.

1. In the absence of existing trees, new plantings should create a framing effect for the house.

2. In the case of western exposure, shade trees are often needed to block the sun, but should only reach a mature height of 30-35 feet.

Where trees are existent, focus on plantings and hardscaping (patios, walls, decks etc.) around the house to take advantage of the natural, valuable landscape. Groves of trees, especially the majestic Live Oak, look wonderful grouped in areas void of sod. It is much easier to mulch under the trees than take care of a lawn. Add a few woodland plantings for interest and the look can be complete.

Shrub placement is important in the landscape design. They soften foundations and create an evergreen backdrop for annual and perennial color. Often times though, inappropriate sized shrubs are used and grow beyond your expectations and cause maintenance nightmares.

A simple way to determine if the shrubs you want will work for you is to measure the height from the ground to the eave of the house. This height will give you a useful tool to work with.

1. Taller shrubs placed at the ends of the house should be approximately two-thirds the height (usually 5-6 feet).
2. Accent shrubs near the entrance about one-half the height (4-5 feet).
3. Foundation shrubs between about one-third the height (2-3').

Plant variety is probably the most fun aspect of the landscape project. We all love plants and may have a hard time narrowing our choices for a front yard landscape. Limiting your choices to 5-7 different species will provide enough variety for an interesting, unified and harmonious landscape. Another way to achieve this is to repeat plant groupings throughout the border or beds.

Plant variety should also provide color and texture. Green is a beautiful color, but adding plants that have colorful foliage and/or blooms really helps spice things up.

1. Bright, warm season colors (red, yellow, orange) will draw the eye to a specific place of interest.
2. 2. Cool season colors (blue, purple, green) recede from the eye. Use these colors to contrast with the bright ones, or to create a cool, calming effect.

Foliage texture can have an impact as well as color in the landscape. Texture is particularly important in the shade garden where color may be harder to incorporate. Bold, large foliage has the same qualities as warm colors by drawing your eye to it. Fine texture works like the cooler colors by receding.