

# The Basic Principles of Landscape Design

**Garden landscape design** is not achieved by following rules and regulations like a slave. You should ensure that your own individual taste, imagination and artistic sense serve as inspiration. Whatever your plan for your garden landscape entails, whether you plan on "borrowing landscaping ideas" or plan on creating your own landscape design, you should have at the very least a basic understanding of the principles of landscape design. These principles are just mentioned here to help you generate your own ideas, to jumpstart your own creativity. Have fun.

## LANDSCAPE DESIGN PRINCIPLES

### Unity

Your garden landscape should be a reflection of the style and architecture of the house, with different parts of the garden landscape blending into a pleasurable, pleasing, easy-on-the-eye whole. For many people the concept unity is understood as **consistency and repetition**. Repetition is where unity is created by repeating elements like plants, plant groups, and the like throughout the landscape. And consistency on the other hand is where unity is created in the sense that some or even all of the different elements used in the garden fit together to form the whole.

The character of elements can also be used to form a consistent whole. Make use of factors such as **height, texture, size, and color schemes** of the elements and/or of the different elements. Make your landscape design achieve a **consistency of character** in this fashion.

Say you are making use of **landscape rocks**. You certainly will not have consistency if you used large, blue, triangular shaped landscape rocks in one spot and in the very next spot accentuate the garden with a large, red or even white, round landscape rocks. I am sure you can see the pattern of this design principle carried over to other elements such as groups of plants and other types of materials in your garden.

Unity can also be achieved using themes in your garden. Some people even think of themes as rooms in the garden. An easy way of creating a theme is to make use of garden décor. Say you are into fantasy and fairy tales; you can create a theme by using plants that attract butterflies, using garden statues, garden ornaments and related garden décor.

Unity can also be used to apply the simplicity principle in your garden.

### Simplicity

Apart from being one principle in landscape and gardening, simplicity is also a principle in art and design. The best advice I have been given as a novice do it yourself gardener was to keep things simple. Start with a simplicity pattern and you can always do more at a later stage. Simplicity applied in terms of the use of **landscape edging** will create a unified look as well and as such do away with a haphazard effect.

Simplicity applied in planting would be to pick two or three colors and apply these colors throughout the garden. Apply the principle of unity insofar as repetition is concerned with these colors. The same applies when it comes to garden décor. **Keep garden décor to a minimum** and within a specific theme to create your "room" and keep landscape elements like hard landscaping consistent is also applying the design principle of simplicity.

### Harmony and Contrast

Flowing lines are always pleasing to the eye, however the bold contrast of a curve combined with a straight line can provide interest in the garden.

Contrast can be found in many guises in your garden. One such example can be where one side of the garden is mainly planted up with large trees to provide shade and the other side of the garden can be predominantly a flower garden or a vegetable garden, or whatever type of garden, or even a mix between the examples given here. Garden contrast can also be seen in an **abstract landscape** while still maintaining unity by using landscape rocks, plants and garden décor.

Many people also make use of plants to create contrast and harmony in their gardens. Plants with fine foliage versus plants with coarse foliage, round leaves versus spiked, needle-like leaves, even making use of complimentary and contrasting colors. However, do remember: **lines, forms and shapes** should flow together harmoniously to enhance the style of your house.

## Balance

Balance as a design principle translates to a **sense of equality and equilibrium** in the garden. It is also the careful **distribution of features** without necessarily spacing them equally far apart. There are basically two types of balance we are concerned with in our garden and landscape, namely: **symmetrical and asymmetrical**.

**Symmetrical balance** refers to a garden landscape where there are more or less equally spaced matching elements in the design. For example these elements could be where the garden is equally divided and both sides share all or even part of the same form, shape, plant height, plant groupings, colors, numbers of flower beds, theme, etc.

**Asymmetrical balance** is more complex. While textures, forms, colors, etc. may remain constant to create some unity, shapes and hard landscapes may be more random. This form of balance often has separate or different themes with each having an equal but different type of attraction. It is sort of unbalanced, abstract and free-form while still maintaining unity by means of repetition.

Do keep in mind that balance in the garden will give you that sense of **stability and restfulness**. In larger gardens it is essential to achieve a sense of balance using symmetry and repetition. Many of these landscape and design principles work together and share correlations to achieve a unified, manicured, well-designed garden.

## Color

Again we are reminded of the artist. Color is that element that adds extra oomph, that extra dimension of real life and interest to the landscape. Just think of the color wheel: bright reds, yellows and oranges, the **warm colors**, have that ability to draw one towards the object. On the other hand the **cool colors** represented by green. Blue and the pastels seem to move away from one and make objects seem farther away. The **neutral colors** are best used in the background. But it has the added advantage of increasing depth in a landscape. Colors like whites, blacks and greys resort under this category.

In a garden this design principle and color theory would translate to the use of dark and coarse textured plants in the foreground and using fine textured and light colored plants in the background. Or alternatively you can make use of color to direct attention to a specific area in your garden.

## Natural Transition

Transition is a term that is quite self-explanatory in that it essentially means **gradual change**. This design principle should be applied to avoid abrupt changes that may occur in your garden design. When using plant height or even plant color, one can achieve natural transition. However one would not limit applying

this principle to these two aspects alone. It should also be carried through to all other elements in the garden.

An example of gradual, natural transition being applied in a garden would be the **stair step effect** from large trees to medium trees to shrubs to plants to lawn. This type of arrangement lends itself to the **creation of illusions** in the garden. A transition from taller to shorter plants will provide a sense of **depth and distance** (again the art analogy), thus making the garden seem larger than it actually is, and vice versa a transition from shorter to taller plants can be used to great effect to **frame a focal point**. It will make the focal point stand out and seem closer than is really the case. These focal points can be anything from **garden ponds** or **water features**, to a **group of striking plants** that focuses attention and adds interest to the garden.

Transition can also be used in creating **vistas**. The illusion of space and distance can create a view. This view can in turn be **framed** by either trees or a moon gate or arch. These objects have the ability to concentrate one's attention rather than allowing an omnipotent view of the whole garden.

## Line

This design principle refers to the structural elements in the garden. This can be seen in the way the flower beds are laid out, the walkways and the entryways that regulate the move and flow of the garden. Straight lines tend to be forceful and direct, whereas curvy lines tend to be more natural, gentle, and flowing.

## Proportion

The design principle of proportion essentially refers to the **size of elements in relation to each other** in any one space. Now one's first reaction is to say OBVIOUSLY. Hold on proportion requires a little thought and planning. Say you are creating a small herb garden and you have a huge garden statue placed in the middle of the herb garden as your focal point, it would be out of proportion and tacky. Or say for instance you have a large open yard and then placing small garden ponds in the middle of this large open yard would be foolhardy as it would then not serve as a focal point, but rather it would get lost in the vista.

Now this does not preclude having small features and garden decor in a large yard. I already mentioned that proportion is relative and elements can be scaled to fit. This is where the creation of different rooms/themes in your garden comes in quite handy. The ultimate aim is after all gardening to create a pleasing relationship among the three dimensions of length, breadth, and depth or height. Small garden ponds can achieve proportionality if it is placed in a corner or on the edge of a large area and thus allowed to become the focal point of the larger area while creating its own distinct little atmosphere if you create a room or theme around it. Also other types of hard landscaping features such as the size of paving that is used in a garden can help pull a garden design together by maintaining proportionality. Furthermore proper plant selection should also be paid attention to so as to achieve proportionality.