

Understanding Garden Design



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The Complete Handbook for Aspiring Designers

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For Michael, whose love and support encouraged this book to come to fruition.

Frontispiece: This stunning “dry” garden is only a portion of a much larger garden. The owners conceived a well-considered pattern of paths to visit and attend to the farthest reaches of the garden. Old Germantown Gardens, Bruce Wakefield and Jerry Grossnickle, owners.

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Trillium kurabayashi is a nice surprise in early spring. Author's garden.

Introduction



Whether you are a novice gardener, are launching a career as a landscape designer, or install gardens, understanding the detailed process of planning, designing, and implementing the installation of a garden is an invaluable tool. Landscape design is an astonishing blend of knowledge. From visualizing concepts to using design principles to setting a stone, you will test your visualization skills repeatedly. The better you understand the entire process, the better the outcome will be.

When I began practicing landscape design, it was after a twenty-two-year career in commercial interior design. I had a bachelor's degree in interior design, but I returned to school to take classes in landscape design. What I discovered was an inadequate choice of reference books that tackle the entire process of landscape design. There are sources that address specific areas or topics. However, I could find no comprehensive resource useful to landscape design students, homeowners, and design-build contractors.

After I had been practicing landscape design for a time, my daughter called to ask for a book recommendation. She had been searching for a book that would help her get started with her garden. She said, "Mom, they all start somewhere in the middle" and added that "the middle" meant a discussion of basic design principles. She was looking for a book that truly started at the beginning. She recognized that something had to happen before thinking about things like form, texture, balance, and other design principles. After I enumerated several tasks that would help her begin the planning of her garden, she said, "Mom, you need to write that book." Thus began my book-writing journey.

A series of zigzag raised beds along the south side of a house provides an attractive kitchen garden just outside the kitchen door. The arrangement not only provides additional planting space but also prevents the space from feeling like a bowling alley. Garden of Darcy Daniels. Photo by Darcy Daniels.

It was with my daughter in mind and my own experience as a landscape design student that I wrote this book. The book begins by answering the question, Why design? This question haunted

me for most of my interior design career. Beyond my enjoyment of what I was doing, how did it benefit the people who used the space? I always hoped that my professional design organization would find a way to evaluate how design benefits people. Where were the measurements that defined the value of design?

A meeting at a high-tech firm's offices to design their interior space revitalized my search. There I found a blue and gray environment that depressed me for the brief period I was there. What was this environment doing to the employees?

I began an evaluation of the benefits of color, and started to find answers in psychological journals and a couple of books about the psychology of color. This search predated the Internet, which meant it took considerably more time and effort to find resources than it does now. Learning about the value of color and its impact on employees helped me change a "blue and gray" organization into one that allowed an expanded use of color in the workplace.

How does landscape design benefit my clients? This continues to be an important question. I know that a layout that meets clients' needs helps them function better. I hope it encourages their interaction with nature. I hope it renews their spirits and gives them a keen sense of being alive. I hope it helps them connect to their greater purpose and inner excellence. Whether a garden is an idyllic setting or rows of crops, it elementally connects us to nature and to our planet. When my hands are in the dirt, someone once suggested to me, that is where I will find wisdom. Is this a provable statement? Perhaps not yet, but it feels right to me as a lifelong, devoted gardener.

This book also includes a chapter about construction and working with contractors. Oddly, this is a rarely touched subject, but it is a topic my clients ask about frequently. I wrote this chapter after creating a database of research with a variety of landscape contractors as a resource. The chapter also benefits from the knowledge I gained during my interior design career and working with many talented architects. The process of designing, creating working drawings and specifications, bidding, and dealing with the incompletion period was one I repeated incessantly in that work.

The last chapter in the book had to be one of celebration and being in the garden. While garden parties allow friends and relatives to share a garden, the open garden allows fellow gardeners to share the experience. I have opened my garden many times to such organizations as the Hardy Plant Society of Oregon and Master Gardeners, and to The Garden Conservancy Open Days Program. While I feel compelled to have my garden in its best condition, I do not believe that a garden must be perfect or that everything must be complete to invite visitors in. In fact, if construction is going on, so much the better. Open gardens are teaching opportunities. They offer an occasion for visitors to learn more about gardening. After gardening for about forty years, I confess I will never know all there is to know about gardening. However, I take delight in the ceaseless curiosity and the valued friendships of fellow gardeners everywhere.



In a well-thought-out border, each plant is visible against the others, will grow in the existing conditions, and with minimal pruning will work within the bounds of the space. Design by Lauren Hall-Behrens, Lilyvilla Gardens.

1 Beginning the Design of Your Garden



What you will learn:

- the value of a garden design
- things to consider before beginning the design process

Why Design a Garden?

Think about the projects you do in your life. Sew a dress, build a house, take a trip—these activities usually succeed because of the planning you do before the experience. Planning and design are intention and purpose. They give a project significance.

Some people think design is too costly. Others think it too esoteric. Still others find it intimidating. However you think of design, it is indispensable to achieving a successful garden. A well-thought-out and carefully planned design will benefit many aspects of your life, including your physical health, your emotional well-being, and, yes, even your pocketbook.

The love of nature and plants often motivates us to fancy a garden that will improve and organize our surroundings. If you think garden design is all about the plants, think again. It is so much more. Design is an intangible. For that reason, people casually apply the word *design* as though it does not take much thought at all. Design is a creative endeavor enhanced by an open mind and a desire to go beyond humdrum.

In general, people find the term *design* ambiguous but understand the word *planning*. The two words are commonly interchanged as though they are synonyms. They are distinct. Design and planning embrace two intentions; you cannot experience one without the other. Planning precedes design. It is the time to prepare for design; to gather, review, and scrutinize information; to examine

and define direction. Planning provides the basis to make decisions during design. Without planning, design is a little like trying to pull a rabbit out of a hat. It only works for skilled magicians.

We see *Primula* every spring, yet because we are color starved at the end of winter, it is hard to bypass. Author's garden.

A designed garden is as different from an undesigned garden as night is from day. An undesigned garden is created without much forethought about how layout and design integrate with the architecture of the home and its interior. A garden without design is often nothing but ill-conceived placements of foundation plants and turf, misaligned concrete, and the occasional swing set with a possible fence to, thankfully, hide some portion of it. A designed garden, alternatively, relates hand in glove with the architecture it surrounds. A designed garden succeeds because its planning considers the design as more than window dressing. A garden conceived through the design process is more than the sum of its parts.



A tree in a naturalized setting is a beautiful union of leaves, branches, trunk, and roots. Home of Maryellen Hockensmith and Michael McCulloch, AIA.

Planning *plus* design makes a difference not only in the efficacy of moving about a garden and using its space, but also in the visual and emotional impact of being in the garden. Research shows that beyond the obvious aesthetic improvements, garden design provides psychological, physiological, sociological, and financial advantages. Whatever the current knowledge, we know that design is about purposeful, meaningful, and innovative placement.

Installing a garden with no deliberation is more expensive than taking the time to plan and design in advance. If you do not spend the time to understand what plants need in the way of general care or placement, you reduce the chance that they will thrive. Take the time to evaluate landscape materials, your property, how you move from one place to another, how you will use your property

to its best effect. If you have high expectations, little knowledge, and a limited budget, expanding your knowledge will extend your budget and increase your degree of success.

Beyond a hobby

“Historically gardens were used to discuss and evaluate society. Now most gardens are a hobbyist pursuit. They can be both,” declares journalist Corinne Julius in the Royal Horticultural Society’s publication *The Garden* (2007). Should we consider gardening as more than a hobby? Could there be more to a garden than gardening?

Because garden planning and design involve more than a casual series of decisions, individuals around the globe are asking the question, What is the meaning of a garden? Those who champion this investigation are on a quest to understand whether creating a garden is an art or a craft. Indeed, they purport that designing a garden goes beyond the plants. “You wouldn’t go to a Mozart opera and talk about what fun he must have had putting all those dots so nicely on the page. But that’s what we do with gardening,” asserts garden writer Stephen Anderton (2009). Clearly, this intellectual pursuit may not appeal to everyone. Critics of this more esoteric approach suggest that emotions should drive the creation of a garden. They believe that one should reflect on what one finds appealing rather than dialogue about it. Perhaps this quandary merits debate as a means to expand our knowledge. What do we have to lose through discussion? Is the creation of a garden art, craft, or science? Perhaps it is all three, bound together as a tree trunk is joined to its roots and leaves.

How *do* we resolve what makes one garden well designed and another hopelessly tacky? Is the beauty in gardens, as in art, in the eye of the beholder? One thing seems certain. When we apply a skillful process of design to a garden, there will likely be greater agreement that the garden is beautiful.

Gardens for health

After reading the words of John Stilgoe, a professor of environmental studies at Harvard University I recognized that the common view of design might be in a state of transformation. He said, “There is emerging medical evidence that the aesthetic end of landscaping turns out to be founded on medical reasons. You will feel better emotionally in a garden” (Colman 2003).

Indeed healing gardens are on the increase. Studies of patients in garden settings, particularly related to hospitalization, give us some valuable input about how people respond emotionally to a garden. Research reveals that patients who have a view of nature or natural elements recover more quickly, require less medication, and have fewer complications after surgery than those who do not.

And if healing gardens help sick people heal faster, how do gardens affect healthy people? Francine Halberg, MD, a radiation oncologist at the Marin Cancer Institute in Greenbrae, California, said of the healing garden there, “It offers a visual solace, a connection to nature, and a sense of peace. The spirit of the garden is growth and renewal, where one can feel connected instead of isolated.” Deborah Burt, a volunteer on the healing environment committee at the Children’s Hospital and Health Center in San Diego, California, said, “Nature heals the heart and soul, and those are things the doctors can’t help. That’s what this garden is all about—healing the parts of yourself that the doctors can’t” (“Healing gardens,” 2002).

Perhaps we might deduce that a garden could prevent sickness or heal parts of ourselves before we are able to detect disease. Indeed, documented investigation began as early as 1937 and is ongoing. Myriads of interactions occur inside our bodies every second. Researchers have proven

that messages sent to the brain through vision have an effect on hormone production, autonomic body function, and ultimately our state of health (see, for example, Rossi 2004, pp. 68–69). It seems that what we see translates to every cell in our bodies. Perhaps if what we see has a positive effect on our psyche, that is what translates to our cells. So too, could a negative view affect us negatively. I always knew that well-designed spaces have a positive effect on people, but I never dreamed it might be something as vital as this.

Yet disheartening studies by Oliver R. W. Pergams and Patricia A. Zaradic (2008) showed that Americans are staying indoors more and more, by a considerable factor. This is particularly true of our children. Environmentally disconnected children equal a disaster waiting to happen. Pergams and Zaradic call the love of television and computer screens videophilia and write that “videophilia has been shown to be a cause of obesity, lack of socialization, attention disorders, and poor academic performance.” Gardens are an opportunity to reconnect our children and ourselves to nature. This in turn holds the promise of inspiring us to care for our environment.

Gardening may not heal a sore back, but surely there is an emotional connection supporting the gardener’s spirit. When I journey through my garden on an early spring day and discover the teensiest of buds, there is an unexplainable soaring in my soul that is enough to help me slog through another week of gray and rainy weather.

Numerous philosophers emphasize the importance of living in the moment and overcoming the obstacles of an overactive mind (Tolle 1999). If you have ever tried counting sheep at night because you are plagued with a to-do list running around in your mind, you have an understanding of what this means. Studies show that when we observe great beauty in nature, it quiets the chatter that is always bubbling away in our brain. Seconds later, our mind starts to think about it rather than merely experience it. We say things like, “It takes my breath away” or “It leaves me speechless.” Sound familiar?



At Good Samaritan Hospital in Portland, Oregon, a garden invites staff and patients alike to experience the healing environment of nature. Legacy Good Samaritan Hospital, Stenzel Healing Garden.

Do we inherently seek beauty to quiet our mind? To what extent does nature nurture us? Who among us would not benefit from a reduction in stress level? Are our eyes and brains capable of autopilot stress reduction? Can Mother Nature’s beauty succor and sustain us, and reduce our stress? Radical concepts! It is common knowledge that when we reduce stress, we improve our

physical well-being. Many people also believe that a quiet mind allows the opportunity for inspiration and creativity. A healthy body and a muse—what else does a well-designed garden offer us?

A personal statement

In a garden, we have the possibility of expressing our culture, our history, and the very essence of ourselves. Gardens can and should be a personal statement. Why would we want to have the same grinning gnome as our neighbor when there is so much that is unique to us? Does it make sense to duplicate that garden bauble that is so *irresistible* if it has nothing to do with our own personal experience and background?

We need to get over our fear of doing something original because the design police might come after us. If we follow sound planning practices and tried-and-true design principles, we can be confident that what we create will work. Then give the raspberries to disapproving critics. Creating a garden brings a tremendous amount of satisfaction when it is not only full of a gratifying collection of plants but also enriched with our own philosophy and memories.

Beginning Your Garden

Assume the design of your garden is a project. Before you begin a project, you define its scope. How can you create a successful design if you do not establish parameters? Consider it garden goal setting. It is no different from preparing a holiday dinner. You decide on recipes, make a grocery list, polish the silver, assemble each recipe, and serve the meal. With no planning, you would have your head in the refrigerator wondering what to serve.



Nature's beauty provides inspiration for our own gardens. Note the simplicity of plant material and massing of plants.

It is so easy to allow those little photosynthesizing vernal gems to sway our good sense. One walk through a nursery and we have a cartful of primroses before we can blink our eyes. We daydream about that blissful alfresco meal in the garden as we look out onto an incoherent and chaotic yard. Thinking beyond “I need some petunias in my garden this summer” brings greater rewards than a passel of brightly colored posies. Maybe what we need is Plantaholics Anonymous to keep us on track to meet our garden design goals.

The garden’s context

We begin our list of objectives by looking at a broad perspective or the big picture of our garden setting. What is the context of our garden, and why is it important?

Study the location of your future garden. If you lived on a country estate, would you design a garden suited to a downtown condominium? The largess of a country estate would dictate a very different type of garden from what would suit the fishbowl of a tiny condominium space. The style of each may also be different, dictating more garden dissimilarity. Having a home in the middle of a forest is vastly different from having one’s neighbor 10 feet away with a 50-foot fir tree. Consider a garden that has fire-retardant characteristics if you live near or in the woods.

Study your environs. Can you borrow a view from your neighbors, a park, or a forest? Imagine how your garden could harmonize with its surroundings. Is there a particular style or type of garden you like? Do you want the mood of the garden to be quiet and meditative or lively and entertaining? Do you have an existing garden to renovate or a blank slate with oodles of mud?

Complement to the built environment

Any good garden design should complement the architecture and interior space it surrounds. How many programs do we watch or attend that tout the importance of having a garden to enhance the curb appeal of a home? So too do we consider the value of our home when we plan for landscaping.

Whether a home is in an urban, suburban, or country setting affects the design of the garden. The closer the neighbors, the more the impact they will have on a garden. Issues of privacy and views tend to be more critical with a zero-lot-line neighbor (a house having one of its exterior walls directly on the property line) than if the nearest neighbor is a mile away. In an urban setting, people often walk to a park or a restaurant. In the suburbs those amenities may be equally convenient, or nearly so. Out in the country it may be more important to create your own amenities to minimize travel and enhance the usability of your property. The farther you are from your neighbor, the more self-reliant you may need to be. Perhaps a toolshed gains importance, as do places to compost yard waste.

Location, location, location

Any real estate agent will tell you that “location, location, location” is of prime importance in buying or selling a house. Too often, I see people make decisions about their garden without considering how their home fits into its local area—particularly their neighborhood. It is unusual to see owners overdo a garden. Frequently, owners install a garden below par for their house.

Keep your landscaping within the context of your neighborhood. Consider the street trees and the general ambience of the homes. Is it an old neighborhood or new? An older neighborhood might mean neighbors who have opinions about what you do in your garden—and are willing to share them. Is it a wide or narrow street, a cul-de-sac, or a main drag? The speed at which traffic passes by your home will likely affect the design of your garden. Is it a gated community with improved

security? Depending on the level of safety, this could reduce your budget for security around your home.

Gated or not, many communities dictate requirements in the form of CC and Rs (covenants, conditions, and restrictions) with which owners must comply. The owner must usually present his or her garden design to an established committee for review and approval. The process is intended to uphold a level of quality to maintain home value, although some owners will still complain about restrictions. If you place a gnome, a pink flamingo, or a cactus in your garden, it could raise a red flag for additional scrutiny by unsympathetic committee members.

In addition to possible CC and Rs, local codes and possible easements may apply to your design. An easement usually allows an agency or entity access to or across your property. For example, a utility company may need to place equipment on your property. Every community has a building code that dictates things like the height of a fence, the setback (the distance between a structure and a street, sidewalk, or property line) of a new structure, or the type of tree planted in the parking strip. It is wise to meet with a local code official and review the laws that could affect your garden design before you complete the design.

You may discover that you have an easement on your property. This information would normally be contained in the papers that accompany purchase of your property and documented in public records, which are accessible through your local government. A permit is often required for certain types of construction—for instance, a swimming pool or gazebo. While the permit cost and process might be something to gnash your teeth over, permits are intended to guarantee the health, safety, and well-being of the public, in addition to contributing to the community coffers. The agency where you meet with the code official is usually where you would also obtain a building permit. If your home is located in a historic district, you may have additional constraints. A design review committee may be required to review and approve your design as part of the permitting process.

Impact of your health

Remember to consider your age and/or your ability to access a garden when planning a garden. Common solutions for wheelchair-bound gardeners are to raise the level of the garden in the form of raised beds and to create ramps rather than stairs. Fencing may be required for the protection of toddlers. It is a good idea to review the requirements set forth by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) when considering the accessibility of a garden. Even if no one in your household currently requires special means of access, visitors with a disability (or even you in a temporarily disabled state) would be grateful to be able to get to the front door and around the garden. Consider your ability to maintain a garden as you age. This may determine the sort of plants you select, the amount of lawn you install, or the type of paving you choose.

Be mindful of the allergies and asthma of the home's occupants when planning a garden. Windborne pollen and a plethora of fragrances can affect a twitchy nose. Asthma resulting from poor air quality is on the upswing. Some plants have a greater capacity to improve air quality. A plant's sap can cause a skin reaction. Poisonous plants have a varying degree of impact on small children and pets. Even plants that attract cats could be an issue for those allergic to them.

Sustainability

The issue of sustainability is in the mainstream conscience. Do you know what sustainability truly means? While we are still waiting for the best definition, the term “cradle to cradle” coined by author and architect William McDonough (McDonough and Braungart 2002) applies to being mindful of the origins and final destinations of any given material we design to use. All of us are

responsible for what we use on and from our planet. Now is the time to begin a lifelong habit as good earth stewards. To gardeners goes the challenge, “Never mind your thumb, how green is your heart?”

America has a sacred cow: the lawn. You might get your knickers in a knot about losing some lawn, but when you stop and think about what it takes to maintain it in pristine condition, is it really worth it? Lawns are colossal water guzzlers. Maintenance services usually use chemicals in the form of fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides to get that perfect shade of green to which we are all so accustomed.

One of my clients and I had a disquieting discussion about her neighborhood, where virtually everyone could afford a landscape maintenance service to keep the lawns as pristine as a golf course. When we discussed the fact that so many services use toxic chemicals to achieve that well-manicured effect, she shared a personal experience. On walks around her neighborhood, she found large quantities of dead bees on the sidewalk. We concluded that there might be a correlation between the use of toxic chemicals and the demise of the bees. If ever there was a good reason to use nontoxic garden solutions, this is one.

More and more businesses are providing sustainable alternatives to unsustainable practices and products. Prices for these new options will come down. Finally, we will have no excuses to avoid thinking globally and acting locally. Be curious about what is out there. Green-conscious business owners are developing new and improved methods to create and to maintain our gardens. Take responsibility for checking out what is available and apply that information during the planning of your garden design.

What to keep

Garden designers are often asked how much of an existing garden should be kept, rearranged, or changed. If you have inherited an existing garden and can bear the wait, it is useful to sit on it for a year. Take the time to document the plants that come and go during each season, unless there is some urgency to get started sooner. You may discover spring- or autumn-blooming bulbs that would not be visible if you moved into your home the preceding winter. Having a blank slate or a newly constructed home usually means getting some landscaping completed as soon as possible. The consequences of waiting tend to be a boatload of laundry every time it rains and cleaning the muddy feet of every child and pet that ventures outdoors, not to mention your own.

When to install

It is not necessary to install a garden project all at one time. Things must be done in a particular order, but installing your garden in phases may work better for any number of reasons. Budget comes to mind as a big reason for phased installation of a garden. Contractor availability can also drive the scheduling of some portions of garden installation. Often the time of year will affect how much of a garden we install at a given time. It is impossible to install utilities and underground work if the ground is frozen. Stonework and precast paving can be set in place during cold weather if the prep work is possible to do or installed earlier. Even concrete can be poured under certain circumstances during cold or wet weather. You can install deciduous bare-root plants and prune some plants before the end of winter while the plants are still dormant if the ground is not frozen.

What You Need to Know to Get Started

You will need to determine several things before you begin planning your garden. Who will make

decisions and control the budget? Do you have a deadline or need a fixed schedule? Get these matters settled now, because waiting until later could result in an unpleasant situation or delay your project.

Who's on first?

Decide in advance how decisions will be made on your project, because there will be a lot of them. If one person will be making all the decisions, it is not much of an issue aside from the need to make the decisions in a timely way. When multiple decision makers have equal authority, it is very important to have a prior arrangement. Perhaps you draw straws for each decision. Perhaps you agree that each person will make a certain range of decisions. However it is decided, arranging in advance how conflicts will be resolved can prevent a divorce, a longer-than-expected installation, or a contractor walking off your job.

It may also help to understand how individuals make decisions. If experience says to you that one person may agonize over finishes for a month, plan to add another month to the schedule. Do not let decision making derail your project.

Handling the purse strings

The amount of money available for your project influences its scope. Do some homework up front to get some idea of what things cost. Nothing is more frustrating than developing a wonderful design you are in a hurry to install and not having enough money to get the job done. If you are working with a professional designer or architect, he or she will usually remind you that your grand ideas may get you a grand invoice. If you are phasing work because funds are not available all at once, you may be able to include certain items in the design that may not have been possible otherwise.

Having an approximate idea of how long you will own your home will help you decide how much to spend on a garden. If you purchase your home for quick turnover, curb appeal will be more important than meeting every functional desire. However, if you are in for the long haul, a larger budget may be more reasonable, especially if there are things on the wish list that would greatly improve your quality of life.



A stone wall installation shows the base of concrete masonry units with stone mortared onto its face. Assuming that the weather allows for mixing mortar and that any excavation work has already been completed, a contractor could install this portion of work even in winter. Design and construction by McQuiggins Inc.

How you plan to use your garden will directly affect your cash outlay, perhaps dramatically so. Dedicated gardeners and owners who do a great deal of outdoor entertaining will usually have a significantly higher budget than a single businessperson who is out of town much of the time. Owners with teenagers are more inclined to consider a swimming pool than are families with toddlers. How you choose to use your garden will correlate with how much you will spend and with the garden's overall design.

It is normal to see clients' eyes roll back into their heads when landscape professionals explain the cost of landscaping. Here are recommendations about adding landscaping to your property:

- The American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) recommends that owners install a garden that is worth approximately 10 percent of the home's value.
- The American Nursery and Landscape Association states that landscaping can bring a recovery value of 100 to 200 percent when it is time to sell your home.
- The Gallup Organization says landscaping can add between 7 and 15 percent to a home's value.

Most people have specific functions in mind for their gardens, requiring some amount of paving or a water feature that usually raises the cost to the percentage recommended by the ASLA. If the house is on 5 acres, the recommended percentage may apply only to the area closer to the house, but there should be some consideration of how much property surrounds the house. Less land allows landscaping dollars to go a lot farther.

Establishing a schedule

Most projects have some sort of schedule, even if only in the owner's head. This schedule might affect decision making—if time is tight, quick decisions will help you stay on schedule. Do research. It will help you develop a realistic schedule. If you do not know how long it takes to

install garden lighting, call an electrician who installs garden lighting. Tell him you are developing a schedule. Ask him for assistance. Let the electrician know you will call him when the time comes to obtain bids for the project.

TASK	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4	WEEK 5	WEEK 6
Collect photos, gather data	• • • • •	• • • • •				
Preliminary decisions		• • • • •				
Measure and photograph site	• •					
Draw base plan		• • •				
Develop concepts on plan			• • • • •			
Review paving materials, plants, decisions			• • • • •			
Get preliminary costs; review budget				• • • • •		
Prepare final master plan					• • • • •	
Review list of contractors and qualifications				• • • • •		

Create a schedule by working backward from the date you want your project completed. If you find you have bypassed your current date, you know your schedule is not realistic. You will need extra help to get the work done, or you may need to change something to reduce lead time.

If the garden must be completed by a specific date, it is a good idea to plan backward to establish a realistic schedule. Identify the date you can begin the installation of your garden and your completion date. Calculate the amount of time in between those two dates. Next, make a list of your tasks. Calculate how much time each task will take and add them together. Create a bar chart with this information.

If the time needed to do all of your tasks exceeds the amount of time you have available, you need to make some decisions. Determine if there are tasks that can overlap or if extra hands can complete some tasks more quickly. If this does not help, you will need to either extend your deadline or eliminate or change one or more of the tasks. It is especially helpful to calculate your schedule in terms of hours rather than days. Then when you need to calculate the cost of someone's labor, you can take his or her hourly rate, multiply it by the number of hours you have projected, and presto—you have an estimated labor cost.

Now that you have given some thought to your objectives in designing your garden, compile a scope statement—a list of general directions. No specifics are required at this point unless you want them included. To demonstrate what a scope statement might look like, I've written one for a hypothetical garden. This garden will serve as an illustration of each new development explored in the chapters to come.

Designing the Hypothetical Garden

The Scope Statement

The hypothetical garden exists only in my mind and on the pages of this book. The garden surrounds an average ranch-style house on an average-size urban lot. The siding is a combination of painted wood clapboard and stone; the hip roof is covered with dark shingles. The windows are primarily horizontal in character with dark bronze frames. The “owner” will keep the existing driveway. A concrete step exists at the front and back door. Either of these can be kept or replaced to make the design work. New paths are needed to get around the house. A fence surrounds the entire back of the property, and neighboring attributes include a stand of trees, among other things.

One of the two trees in the front will remain. The parking strip is not part of the redesign. It is already parking friendly, relates well to those walking by, and contains drought-tolerant plants. The home is in a residential neighborhood with average foot and vehicle traffic.

For this hypothetical situation, I want a garden that

- is sustainable and environmentally responsible
- has contemporary style
- offers a mix of quiet areas and entertaining spaces
- has space to grow food all year
- includes hobby space
- has a space for the family pet
- allows for evening activities
- accommodates all guests, including those with physical challenges

2 Documenting Your Site



What you will learn:

- **how to assess your site**
- **how to understand and use architectural elements in your design**
- **how to document and measure your house and site**
- **how to create your existing conditions plan**

Assessing Your Site: What to Record and Why

Even if you can recall everything you have ever heard, read, or seen, documenting your site at the beginning of planning your garden is crucial. For some this can be an easy process; for others, quite an exercise. Measuring around existing trees and shrubs, in particular, can be more difficult than you might imagine. Even more demanding is measuring a steep slope with existing plants.

The more challenging your property, the more you may want to consider engaging the services of a surveyor. The property that my spouse and I own is half gently sloped or flat, and half a precipitous ravine. We have preferred to hire hearty souls with survey equipment to rummage around the ravine and to obtain measurements—especially of the degree of slope. Their efforts have been worth every nickel spent. Besides, sticky, thorny Himalayan blackberries grow down there.

You may have poison ivy, poison oak, poison sumac, or—quelle horreur!—kudzu, or possibly all four plus blackberries, in which case you deserve a great deal of sympathy. Your preference may be

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