

Gardening 101: Lesson Six - Garden Design, Part 2

Lesson Four of this series, which appeared earlier, dealt with garden design but there are a few more things to know about the subject. We covered the various styles of gardens there are and what the major components are (hardscaping, trees and shrubs, perennials, etc.) but how do you go about achieving a design?

First of all, have a plan. This is essential even if you want to have a laissez-faire or cottage style. You need a plan to decide what you want in your garden and where you want to place everything. A plan will guide your purchases and what work to do when. Making a plan will help you establish a general colour scheme; the amount of lawn, patio or deck to incorporate; how many trees or shrubs to include; where to make perennial beds and more.

As stated in lesson four, you can either do a design plan yourself or you can hire a professional but in either case, you'll have to do some thinking about what you'd like. Take a look at garden design books or magazines, go on garden tours either in person or on TV or the Internet, and talk to other gardeners. Just be sure to keep our specific Ottawa plant needs in mind. In Old Ottawa East, we live in Canadian plant hardiness zone 5 which, incidentally, equates to United States zone 4. Plants in our neighbourhood have to be able to survive both cold winters and hot humid summers.

Be careful with British or U.S. sources because many will show designs for growing conditions we can never hope to achieve here and a lot of Canadian books and magazines tend to concentrate on Toronto and Vancouver gardens (much warmer than Ottawa) so watch out for this too. But such sources are useful for overall garden layouts and colour schemes. As our gardens are pretty small urban sites, John Brookes is a good author to look for as he specializes in small garden design. An excellent Canadian book is by Allen Paterson, entitled *Designing a garden: a guide to planning and planting through the seasons*. It was published in 1992 so you may have to check around to find a copy. A more recent book was published in 2004 by the magazine *Canadian gardening*; its title is *City gardens: creative urban gardens and expert design ideas*.

Two good Canadian magazines to check are *Gardening Life* and *Canadian gardening*. You can find back issues at the library and current issues on many news-stands. In fact, the book *City gardens* is a compilation of articles from *Canadian gardening* magazine so you might want to look at it first before trolling through all the back issues. Look for gardens you admire and check to see if a garden plan is included in the text.

Once you have a plan, here's the order in which you achieve it. First, get the hardscaping done – put in the paths, the deck, the patio, the stonework where you want it. Again, you can hire someone to do this or you can do it yourself but if you don't get these major items in place first, you're going to find it much harder and expensive to put them in after the fact. Then, plant the trees and shrubs. Unless you have lots of money to spare, you'll be putting in young specimens and you'll be tempted to crowd in more. Resist the temptation! Trees need room and so do shrubs; if you plant them too close together you'll only end up having to dig some out, to the detriment of your overall design. Finally, complete the planting of borders and beds.

Here are a few specific design tips:

- Combinations of perennials look best if they are repeated several times throughout the garden. Repetition creates rhythm and draws the eye along.
- Plan the garden as seen from the house or other vantage point from which you most commonly view it. Make sure the area you usually look at has a good assortment of plants to make sure you have something attractive to look at throughout the year.
- Bear in mind the final size of the plants; most perennials grow least three times the original size within a few years. Fill in the early blank spaces with annuals.
- If you site garden borders around the periphery, be sure to leave room right along the yard margins so that you can easily weed from both sides.
- Most of our gardens are pretty small but you can make them look larger if you make the far ends of borders more narrow and include some large-leafed plants close to the front end.

Next Lesson: Choosing and obtaining plants