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## Landscape Design Principles

Since the space that a garden occupies is three-dimensional, the starting point of design is to get inside that space and create it from within. Imagine being inside a piece of sculpture. The developing space needs to evolve to accommodate the use, comfort and pleasure of its creator. The design elements are then employed to determine the way space will be perceived. All artists – photographers, painters, weavers, sculptors ... and yes, garden-makers ... use these same principles to create something magical.

Line is impressed upon all of us from earliest childhood – remember defining objects with connect-the-dots drawings, or the burden of having to carefully colour inside the lines? Later one had to learn to write letters on a straight line as well as discovering just what the horizon line meant. In garden design, the form of a line creates a sense of direction as well as a sense of movement. The eye automatically follows a garden line, whether it be the edge of a walkway, the curve of a flower bed, or the outline of plant materials. The character of a line yields specific responses. Gentle, slow curves and horizontal lines tend to be experienced as restful while jagged diagonals or vertical lines create more excitement and tension.

Form, the shape defined by line, is probably the most enduring element in garden design. It is what is seen when first looking at a garden from a distance. Every plant has a distinct growth habit, a unique mass and volume which develops and changes as the plant matures. These shapes, whether pyramidal, weeping, columnar, spreading or round, divide and define the spaces in the garden. Some forms are more dramatic than others and so attract attention. The siting of a specific plant may block a view, or open a sight-line, or alter the view depending on the maturity and growth-habit of the plant – open or compact, herbaceous, evergreen or deciduous. These plant qualities often change with the seasons and restructure the lines of the garden. The form of the plants selected and their placement are critical to creating comfortable, dynamic spaces and pleasing silhouettes.

Texture in the garden creates sensual and visual excitement. It is generally read as the mass and void of foliage, bark or flowers and changes with the light during the day and with the seasons. Up close, the size and shape of the leaves and twigs become the predominant textural elements of a plant. From a distance, it is the quality of light and shadow on the entire form, the patterns of light and dark, that translate as texture. Rough, coarse textures tend to create an informal mood and are visually dominant, while fine, smooth textures are associated with formal, elegant, subdued moods and are visually more passive. Fine-textured plants are visually translated as being farther away, so fine textures can be a tool for providing a sense of perspective in a small garden and making the space appear larger. On the other hand, the predominance of coarse-textured plants make a garden space appear smaller. Strong textural contrasts add drama and interest to a garden. Bark and foliage are two ways of adding textural interest to any space.

Scent in a garden is often neglected. Introducing a variety of fragrances will bring an extra dimension to the garden by expanding sensory awareness. The scent of delicately fragrant plants is more appreciated if they are located near a path or at the edge of a patio or entry area. Specific fragrances, like colours, evoke emotional responses and can help create a certain mood or sense of time in the garden.

Colour is often a confusing and puzzling design element for many gardeners. On the other hand it seems to be the one and only element some gardeners consider when planning a garden. Although colour is a key element in the design of a garden, many give it too great an importance and fret continually about the often complex rules which some designers have propounded.

The gardener's final choice of a formula is dictated by location, the size of the garden, and the kind of garden wanted. In designing them I develop specific colour schemes using the palette approach, creating for example, a white garden or a blue border. Generally, the more area to be dealt with the more complex the colour scheme can be. A garden created in limited space will be more dramatic if the colour scheme is kept as simple as possible.

Research has identified the emotional responses specific colours typically generate. The bright reds, yellows, and oranges tend to excite. The softer

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blues, pinks, greens, and violets produce a calming, tranquil effect. This is one reason why the monochromatic green gardens of the Japanese are so revered. The 'music of the colour green' is a phrase often heard in reference to the basic garden colour, broken into numerous tones ranging from blue-green to yellow-green. White tends to be the great unifier, providing a neutral, yet somewhat uplifting spirit. Gardeners need to employ an awareness of colour responses when planning the functional needs of garden spaces. In general, warm colours - red, yellow, orange - attract the eye, standing out or advancing. Cool colours - blues, most violets and some greens - recede into the landscape. Colour therefore contributes to a sense of depth by defining spatial relationships. Remember too that colours in the landscape are not static, changing with the time of day, cloud cover, and season. Colour intensity directly relates to the amount of reflected light. Flower colour is transient, while foliage, bark, seed pods, and berries provide colour highlights and interest at other times of the year, so must loom large in design considerations.

To create a garden space satisfying to the senses and imparting a feeling of unity with the environment, gardeners must also consider six basic principles of design: repetition, variety, balance, emphasis, sequence, and scale.

Repetition is the continuing thread in a garden and is generally defined as duplication. When any design element is repeated the mind is better able to understand the composition as a whole and so a sense of order is introduced. The qualities or character of an object - line, form, texture, scent or colour - are usually repeated. Repeating finely textured plants in a garden helps unify the design and impart a powerful sense of simplicity. Repetition is simply a matter of holding one design quality constant while varying the others. A word of caution: if repetition is carried to extremes the garden will become either monotonous or so subtle that the viewer only sees disorder.

Variety is the life of the garden. The design qualities of line, form, texture, scent and colour are changed and contrasted to provide diversity and avoid uniformity. Diversity develops a tension which helps to hold the observer's attention while creating excitement and enjoyment. Variety is the opposite of repetition. But when it is overdone by adding too many elements, chaos results - so a very fine balance between repetition and variety is needed to achieve unity in a landscape.

Balance refers to the stability or repose of the garden, and is realised by creating an equilibrium between the parts that make up the whole. Line, form, texture, scent and colour all attract our attention so these sensual energies must be gauged and then balanced out. One form of balance relates to layout along a preconceived central axis. That axis can either be informal or formal in its arrangement. Formal or symmetrical arrangements are exactly the same on either side of the axis, while informal or asymmetrical arrangements are unlike on either side of the axis. Another way of conceiving an axis is in the vertical dimension. Natural, informal landscapes which are increasingly popular, depend upon balancing vertical and horizontal elements or small, dense masses balancing large, diffuse groupings. In all cases the elements being balanced must both hold the same importance in the eye.

Emphasis refers to those garden elements which initially seize attention and to which the eye continually returns. It is the creation of the more important and the less important elements in the garden. The parts of any composition should not be equal in their visual interest. Certain parts should be different, perhaps larger, of a contrasting colour, form, fragrance, or texture than the rest, depending on the function of the design. Again, if too many elements are introduced the effect is lost. Emphasis can be achieved only by limiting the number of dominant design elements.

Sequence is the movement of the garden. It is the rhythms that develop when line, form, texture and colour are changed in a consistent way to lead in a particular direction or to a point of focus. Sequence helps to connect the various design elements. It can be achieved through repetition, being careful to avoid a monotonous repeat; or by progression, such as using textures in graded steps from fine to coarse; or by alternation, a repetition of two or more contrasting features.

Scale within the garden, as distinct from the overall scale of the garden as discussed earlier, refers to the harmony of the garden. That is, all the elements of a garden should agree in the sense they convey the size of the whole. The actual size of an object is different from its relative scale or proportion in relation to other neighbouring objects. So scale is concerned with the relationship between the size of an object to the size of the other objects within the same composition. Thus, a tiny alpine plant is out of scale among tall trees, just as it would be planted next to a large building.

With these general principles in mind, applied in connection with the elements of line, form, texture, scent, and colour, a simple garden space can become a work of art.

Photography Andrew Jakovac.

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