

The Front Yard Alverno College

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The front yard or the public area of the landscape is the area most often viewed by the passing public or visitors. A well designed landscape will provide your house with “curb appeal”.

Design functions of the public area

1. Put the house in a complimentary setting
2. Identify the entry point
3. Provide access to the entry

Design principles

1. Balance
2. Repetition
3. Unity
4. Simplicity

Before you start

1. Make a list of what you want to accomplish
2. Make a list of the:
 - a. plants you want to use
 - b. embellishments (stuff)
 - c. type of edging
 - d. entry walk material
 - e. lighting
 - f. mulch
 - g. planting containers
 - h. etc.
3. Is it a “do it yourself project” or does a professional need to be hired or a combination of both (“sweat equity”)
4. How much time do you want to spend on maintaining the landscape
5. There are low maintenance landscapes but “no maintenance landscapes” are not possible. For some people 4 hours a week is low maintenance for others 30 minutes would be high.
6. High maintenance landscape consists of:
 - a. lots of different plant material
 - b. lots of annuals

- c. lots of different perennials
“If you use 50 perennials, 5 drifts of 10, there are 5 plant care decisions that must be made throughout the season. If you plant 25 groups of two plants, there are 25 plant care decisions that must be made.

Do's and don't s

1. Don't over plant, but do introduce some variety
2. Don't buy plants just because they are on sale
3. Do research the plants for hardiness, disease resistance, invasiveness, etc.
4. Don't make the front yard an area to display your collection of “stuff”, but an area that the “stuff” is part of and compliments the design.
5. Don't be impatient and jam plants together, give them a chance to reach a nice form.
6. Do fine tune your landscape by adding, moving or replacing elements.

Major hardscape areas

Driveway

1. The shape of the driveway many times is a given. Not a lot of room for design creativity.
2. It is much easier to match the grade to the driveway than the reverse. The same goes for the sidewalk, but this task can be accomplished in reverse if needed.
3. When planting near the driveway try to allow a minimum of 2-3 feet distance between the edge of the driveway and the mature spread of the shrub. This prevents damage from being run over by cars, bikes, etc. and prevents snow breakage.
4. Don't line the driveway with plant

Entry walk

1. The entry way sidewalk should be a minimum of 4 feet wide, five or bigger is better
2. Flare the walk to the driveway and the stoop
3. Try to keep the inside edge of the walk a minimum of 5 feet from the house, up to 8 feet is even nicer. This space is used to create your entry garden
4. Both concrete pavers and paver bricks make excellent walks.
5. The walk should be designed to lead people to your front door as straight as possible

Major planting areas

Entry garden

1. This is the area between your walk and the house.
2. If enough room was left this will give you an excellent place for a garden.
3. Use interesting plants since the walk from the drive to the front door should be a pleasant one for your guests and maybe even an interesting one.
4. Use a combination of shrubs, annuals and perennials.
5. Water features are best left to the back yard.
6. A good place for the use of design appropriate "stuff"
7. Many times the water spigot will be in this area. The design will need to work around this. Nice to have a solid or semi solid area by the spigot.

Opposite side sidewalk plantings

1. Should match or repeat some of the element in the entry court garden
2. Can be a small berm or raised area.
3. Can have a small tree
4. Make sure the spread of the mature tree will not touch the house. Most Ornamental Crab Apple trees should be spaced at least 12 feet on center from the house. A Maple would be 15-20 feet.

Corner planting

The purpose of the corner planting is to soften the transition of the horizontal line of the lawn and the vertical line of the corner of the house. It consists of the following plants:

1. Large to medium size deciduous shrubs coming directly off the corner of the house (at least 5-6 feet from the center). Avoid upright pyramidal shrubs. They tend to reframe or accentuate the vertical.
2. Two medium to small size shrubs on both sides of the corner.
3. Possibly a few other shrubs or drifts of perennials.
4. Corner plantings can come out 12, 15-20 feet from the house.
5. Not always the best place to plant annual beds.
6. Large corner plantings can be created with small trees or very large shrubs such as: Ornamental Crabs, Amelancher, Red Bud, etc. Large corner plantings may extend 12-15 plus feet from the corner of the house.

Foundation planting

1. The plantings next to the foundation.
2. In residential plantings these usually consist of small, maybe medium size deciduous plants and prunable evergreen plants.

3. Design the foundation planting beds so they are at least 4-5 feet wide. This provides for a better selection of plant material and more space to spread.
4. If a shrub spreads 4 feet make sure the center of the shrub is 3 feet from the foundation.
5. First used to cover up the unfinished or high foundation walls of older houses.

Berms

1. Add relief to a flat yard.
2. Can add a lot of interest to the front.
3. A good rule of thumb is berms should be 1 foot in height for every 4 feet of width.
4. Can provide good screening with plants
5. Avoid berms that are 6 feet high and 8 foot spread

Container gardens

1. The stoop area is a good place for pots of plants
2. Almost any type of container can be used
3. Adds to the color scheme
4. Can provide color from early May to Turkey Day. Pansies in spring, followed by summer annuals, followed by fall mums, followed by seasonal decorations.
5. Pots of plants can be set into the garden
6. Containers can be filled with Halloween, Turkey Day and Christmas decorations
7. Concrete containers, although expensive, can be an attractive element on the front stoop. Use a production pot inside your expensive concrete pot to help extend the life of the container.
8. Pots should be stored dry. Wet soil will freeze and crack the pots.
9. Don't be afraid to rearrange your containers

Other elements of the front yard

Yard Embellishments (stuff)

1. Can be difficult to fit into the design
2. Could be better used in garden situations
3. Should fit the style of the house

Fences

1. Used for screening
2. Used for boundary marking
3. Make good back drops for plants

Low voltage lights

1. Can be an important feature of the front yard.
2. Mark the walkway.
3. Shine up into trees.
4. Solar lights are becoming popular.
5. Avoid the airport runway effect

Miscellaneous

1. Create the bones of the garden and yard.

The bones are structures or plants that will in some form provide structure throughout the entire growing season. Boxwood or a Yew will be evergreen all year providing year round structure. A Daylily or Hosta will go dormant in the winter and not provide any structure. The bones tie the design together and provide areas for the landscaper to add some interesting minor elements.

2. To use or not to use edging
3. To use or not to use weed barrier
4. The dead zone
5. Rain gardens